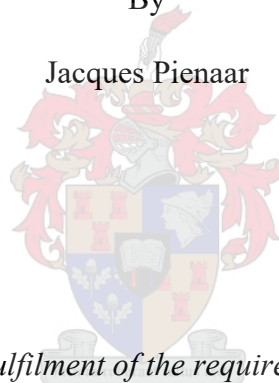


The life and work of G.B.A. Gerdener with special reference to his
contributions to Afrikaner identity formation and the racial discourse in
South Africa from 1925 to 1950.

By

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Declaration

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Abstract

When considering the Afrikaner nation's struggle for national existence, social legitimacy and eventual political domination in South Africa, under the guise of the apartheid system, names such as D.F. Malan and H.F. Verwoerd often dominate the discourse. However, during the 1920s and 1930s, the period in which the idea of an exclusive Afrikaner identity began to crystalize, the Dutch Reformed Church minister, G.B.A. Gerdener, played such a significant formative role in the developing racial ideology of the Afrikaner leaders that in 1958 an American journalist dubbed him the principal author of the apartheid policy.

From the opening decades of the 20th Century, Gerdener contributed to the rising culturally exclusive Afrikaner identity as a historian, missiologist and ecclesiastical leader. Through his position in the Dutch Reformed Church's Federal Mission Council and his editorship of the mission journal, *Op Die Horison*, he exerted his greatest influence on public opinion regarding racial policy. This public prestige as a leading missiological and racial strategist grew dramatically and reached a climax in 1950 with Gerdener's organising and leading of a vast congress on the delicate racial situation in South Africa. A congress which had as its agenda the blueprint for a future South African society, which would consist of separate, autonomous and ethnically designated states.

This biographical study intends to track this influence which Gerdener had on the developing Afrikaner identity as well as the racial ideology of the Afrikaner people. Methodologically, a critical literary analysis of primary archival sources will be used in specifically investigating Gerdener's work on the Federal Mission Council and his instrumental role in the formulation of the Dutch Reformed Church's mission policy, which served as a basis for the eventual secular apartheid policy which was officially accepted by the National Party in 1945.

Opsomming

Wanneer die Afrikaner nasie se stryd vir volks bestaan, sosiale geldigheid en uiteindelijke politieke oorheersing in Suid Afrika, onder die vaandel van die apartheid sisteem, ondersoek word, domineer name soos D.F. Malan en H.F. Verwoerd dikwels die gesprek. Nietemin, gedurende die 1920s en 1930s, die tydperk waarin die idee van 'n eksklusiewe Afrikaner identiteit tasbaar begin word het, was die rol van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) predikant, G.B.A. Gerdener, in die ontwikkeling van 'n rasse ideologie vir die Afrikaner leiers, van so 'n groot omvang dat hy in 1958 deur 'n Amerikaanse joernalis as die kritiese outeur van die apartheid beleid genoem is.

Vanaf die openings dekades van die 20ste eeu het Gerdener bygedra tot die groeiende eksklusiewe Afrikaner identiteit as gevolg van sy werk as 'n geskiedkundige, missioloog en kerklike leier. Deur sy rol in die NGK se Federale Sending Raad en in sy hoedanigheid as redakteur van die sending joernaal, *Op Die Horison*, het hy sy grootste invloed uitgeoefen op publieke opinie aangaande rasse beleid. Hierdie publieke roem, as 'n voorste missioloog en rasse strateeg, het dramaties gegroei en 'n klimaks bereik in 1950 met Gerdener se organisering en leiding van 'n massiewe kongres aangaande die delikate rasse situasie in Suid Afrika.

Hierdie biografiese studie beoog om Gerdener se invloed op die ontwikkelende Afrikaner identiteit, sowel as die rasse ideologie van die Afrikaner volk, voor te lê en na te volg. Met betrekking tot die metodologie van hierdie studie is dit hoofsaaklik gebou op 'n kritiese literêre analise van primêre argief bronne. Hierdie analise dien dan as die vertrekpunt van waar Gerdener se werk op die Federale Sendings Raad, sowel as sy rol in die formulering van die NGK se sendings beleid, ondersoek word, met die gevolgtrekking dat sy bydrae 'n fundamentele rol gespeel het in die amptelike aanvaarding van 'n sekulêre apartheid beleid deur die Nasionale Party in 1945.

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Captured within the 150 pages of this dissertation are two of the most challenging years I have ever faced, both personally and academically. Therefore, I would like to make use of this moment to extend my deepest appreciation to the individuals and structures which carried me through the strife. My deepest gratitude to the unsung heroes and heroines of historical research, the members who work in the archives. Specifically, I want to extend my dearest thanks to dr. Isabel Murray from the Dutch Reformed Church Archive in Stellenbosch and the countless cups of caffeine which she provided me with, without whom I would not have been able to get this research off the ground. Similarly, the constant support I received from my supervisor, Prof. Retief Muller, in keeping me on track as well as in calming my nerves was invaluable over the past two years. The historical discussions in Prof. Muller's office, which ironically used to be Gerdener's office in the Seminary, were rich and stimulating. I would also like to thank Prof. Dion Forster for being a pillar of support during Prof. Muller's transition to Calvin University in America. Then, a word of gratitude to the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University, my academic home for the past 7 years, for the structures and opportunities which made this master's research possible and pleasant. A word of thanks to Esther van der Vyver for her editorial expertise and help in the final stages of the thesis, as well as to Prof. Len Hansen for his support during the early stages.

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Introduction

“Separateness is nothing more than a path on which we seek to grant each demography its full rights – namely the right to be children of God’s kingdom and to become valued citizens of their own terrain”.¹ At the peak of his public influence, Gustav Bernard August Gerdener chose these words to illustrate his vision for a future South African society; one which he believed carried the exclusive solution to a heterogeneous civilization characterized by a sensitive and disproportionate racial fabric. It was also a sentence which perfectly portrayed the ideals which buttressed Gerdener’s racial policies. Policies of such influence that ten years after the formal political victory of the Afrikaner nationalists, an American journalist saw fit to describe Gerdener as “the principal author of apartheid”.² Due largely to names such as D.F. Malan and H.F. Verwoerd dominating many apartheid retrospections, the name of Gerdener and the pivotal role he played in the foundational crafting of the eventual apartheid policy is generally overlooked.

Afrikaner nationalism, Afrikaner identity and the eventual apartheid policy found its origin in the 1920s and 1930s. Synchronous with these testing times in South Africa was Gerdener’s position as a prominent intellectual within the cultural and religious home of the majority of Afrikaners, the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). The pulpit afforded Gerdener a platform to contribute to almost every facet of a growing Afrikaner self-awareness as he sought to simultaneously elevate Afrikaner cultural identity and religiosity through his missional historiography. This characteristic to Gerdener’s rationality is epitomized by his crowning academic publication of 1959, *Die Afrikaner en die Sending*, in which he depicted the Afrikaner’s historical narrative within a glorified missional framework. Further, he weighed in on the Afrikaner’s fight for an exclusive identity in contributions to literature, church liturgy and the advancement of the Afrikaans language. Primarily, however, Gerdener was a missiologist and was often dubbed the leading mission strategist within the DRC during the mid-20th Century. Christian missionary work, which was instilled in him from a young age, remained a central pillar to Gerdener’s life. This missionary tradition intensified throughout his life and served as the basis for his racial perception and program. Coupled with this pseudo-

¹Minutes of the 1950 Ecclesiastical congress on the Native Question. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV232].

²Robert Ardrey, *The Reporter Article*. 27 November 1958. [DRC Archives in SA, PPV 78].

scientific approach to missiology, Gerdener was influenced by the evangelical school upheld by John R. Mott and Andrew Murray, which filtered a certain moderatism into his nationalism.

It was in his seat as DRC mission leader that Gerdener would emboss himself onto South African racial politics. Through his standing within the DRC's Federal Mission Council (FMC), Gerdener significantly contributed to the drafting of the church's federal mission policy; a document which would prove to be a blueprint for apartheid and which was subsequently accepted by the National Party as its official racial policy in 1945. The 1940s also saw a significant inflation in Gerdener's secular influence pertaining to matters of racial relations as his audience widened from a congregational setting to one more reminiscent of a political arena. Further, his role as the intellectual link between the National Party and the DRC, his influence within academic circles, contributions to racial policy and his role as chairman of the South African Bureau of Race Relations (SABRA) led to one article in the *Kerkbode* referring to him as a "prophet" when it came to racial and societal matters.³

With Gerdener playing such a palpable role in the development of Afrikaner nationalism, it may seem strange that his name all but disappeared within the periphery of apartheid studies. One reason for this may be due to the impetus in post-apartheid historiographies to emphasize figures who contributed to the system's dismantling, rather than its construction. In recent years however, more than twenty years into a new democracy, fresh historical studies have delved into our past and placed sensitively controversial events and people under an investigative light, not to provide justification or apology but in an attempt to understand.

We should keep in mind that historical subjects are contextually bound and in no uncertain terms need to be approached as products of their time. It should also be remembered that historiographers too are not free from bias. As part of the so-called "born-free" generation I have only been exposed to a post-apartheid dialogue, in a society which is at least legislatively free from discrimination. That being said, for the majority of my life constitutionally sanctioned racial segregation remained a somewhat foreign concept and from afar seemed almost supra-human in its evilness. This research was, therefore, predominantly prompted by a realisation of the human factor behind a horrifically inhumane system. An attempt to engage with an uncomfortable paradox which lays beneath the surface of our dark heritage and one which the South African ethicist, Piet Naudé, introduced with the question of how well-intentioned Christian people could do inhumane things in the name of God and how a

³Die *Kerkbode*, 23 August 1967. Pg. 261.

seemingly Orthodox belief system may support systematically unethical constructs and attitudes.⁴ With these questions in mind, this academic enquiry intends on placing the human reality behind the apartheid system, which the United Nations declared a crime against humanity in 1971, under an investigative light. It aims to, in as unbiased a manner as possible, gain a clearer understanding of how such a monstrous system could ever see the light of day and how its formulators, specifically Gerdener, saw it as “the only solution to South Africa’s racial question”.⁵

To this end the art of biography, as a genre of historiography, has much to offer. It affords the researcher and reader the opportunity to peer behind any preconceived constructions of our past by making use of certain people, their surrounds and their stories, as lenses through which to gain deeper historical insight. As intellectual profit of these biographical endeavours, we gain a sensitivity towards the complexities of our past, however dark that heritage may be, and are reminded that the evils there within were not imposed upon us, but were bred from within a fallible humanity in which we all share.

More specifically, this biographical study will focus on the person, life and work of G.B.A. Gerdener and the influence he carried during the incubation period of what would become known as apartheid. Accordingly, this focus within the research question also explains the demarcated periodisation of the study as it serves to mark two critical points in Gerdener’s involvement within the country’s racial discourse. Gerdener’s appointment onto the DRC’s Native Affairs Commission in 1925 inaugurated his formal contact with racial politics, while the vast conference which he organised in 1950 proved notable as being somewhat climactic with regards to his racial ideology. The congress, which was simultaneously chaired by Gerdener, had as its agenda the social restructuring of South Africa into a community of autonomous states and critically replaced the concept of “race” with “separate development”.⁶ A term emphatically advocated by Gerdener and one which soon became the designator of choice for the NP’s racial policy, as apartheid was deemed a term too negative and racist. This already carries with it profound questions, would not blatant racism be easier to quash? Did Gerdener’s seemingly moderate ideals of separate development, in which different nationalities were to develop alongside each other without imposing on each other’s terrains, in fact serve to mask the evilness of racial discrimination and further provide the moral justification required

⁴ Piet Naudé, *Pathways in Ethics: Justice, Interpretation, Discourse, Economics*, Vol. 9. (Stellenbosch: SUN media, 2016), 107.

⁵ Op Die Horison, 1943, No. 1 [DRC Archives in SA], 2.

⁶ Johann Kinghorn, “Modernization and Apartheid: The Afrikaner Churches”. In: *Christianity in South Africa: a political, social and cultural history*, ed. Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport. (Cape Town: David Philp, 1997),

to allow apartheid to remain implemented for almost half a century? To this end, a more comprehensive understanding of historical figures, such as Gerdener, and their contexts may serve to inform our prophetic discourse by contributing towards more enlightened definitions of past injustices, thereby informing our united and continuing struggle for a more humane and just society.

Methodologically this research centres around the literary review of primary historical sources found in the Dutch Reformed Church archive in Stellenbosch. The DRC archive holds a vast collection of information and documents pertaining to Gerdener and the context within the DRC surrounding him, both in a direct and indirect capacity. Throughout this investigation archival sources were utilized, however the large majority of research focused on documents relating to the Federal Mission Council. This included meeting minutes, letters which were sent to and from the FMC, speeches which were delivered, memorandums which were sent to government officials, the federal mission policy as well as drafts which specifically dealt with secular racial matters. These were then later bulked up with sources relating to SABRA, which in essence follow an analogous line with respect to racial policy. Another important source of information in this study rested upon the copies of Gerdener's mission quarterly, *Op Die Horison*, which are also located in the Stellenbosch archives. When investigating Gerdener's direct ecclesial presence, however, other sources were used. Church council meeting minutes, of both the Stellenbosch and Wakkerstroom congregations, were predominantly used to track the work of Gerdener the DRC minister. Further, sermons were analysed to gain a deeper sense of his spirituality and his proclamations from the pulpit. Several works which Gerdener produced of a dogmatic nature, such as *Handboek by die Katkisasie*, were also reviewed for deeper insight into his doctrinal position. These primary archival sources are further complimented and fleshed out through the analysis of Gerdener's own publications which range over several topics and eras.

These documents reveal a deeply religious, devoutly disciplined and intensely intellectual man within a complex tableau comprised of several moving parts. As an example, it may surprise the reader that, although Gerdener was one of the chief engineers behind apartheid fundamentals, he cannot simply be categorized as a radical Afrikaner nationalist. Gerdener opposed the idea of biological racism, which took in the belief that the white race was inherently superior, but rather emphasised historical, cultural and habitual differences when defining ethnic distinctions between peoples. In this sense it was predominantly the 19th century missionary tradition and its intent on forming autonomous mission churches under

Christian paternalism which underpinned Gerdener's policies, rather than a hateful racism. Coupled with this, Gerdener was uncomfortable with the reality of an increasing majority within the DRC which drew direct justification for apartheid out of biblical texts, although he did find certain biblical principles which he argued could provide certain support for racial segregation. Gerdener was, therefore, a complex character and although all the classical marks of Afrikaner nationalism were present in his thinking, in one way or another, his position was more akin to the liberal nationalism of N.P. van Wyk Louw who injected an ethical dimension into the Afrikaner's struggle for survival. Significantly, it is these two men whom the famed Afrikaner historian, Hermann Giliomee, credits with the formulation of apartheid in its most sophisticated form, along with Hendrik Verwoerd, Piet Cillie and Albert Geyer.⁷ In the end however, it was this idealistic element to Gerdener's grand vision which proved its ultimate downfall and which prevented its full expression.

The depiction of Gerdener as a moderate nationalist, or as the liberal South African politician during the first half of the century, Alfred Hoernlé, would have put it, a 'double-minded segregationist', becomes apparent when placing him against his colleague, and Free State mission secretary, J.G. Strydom. Strydom, who also served on the FMC, differed from Gerdener in that his urgent calls for racial separation permeated out of a fear for white survival against an overwhelming black majority and set his intentions purely on ensuring white domination. The historian Richard Elphick, who is a frequent dialogue partner within this study, also picks up on the contrast between these two men and points out the seemingly 'progressive' intentions behind Gerdener's theories in that his idea of segregation was not to lead to the subordination of black people but, over time, to "an equivalent grade of independence [for blacks] as we [whites] aspire in the rank of nations".⁸ Elphick also places Gerdener firmly within the evangelical banner epitomized by the controversial DRC Theologian Johannes du Plessis. In this sense, Hermann Giliomee depicts Gerdener as an idealist and his program of total and utter separation, a dynamic endeavour of several autonomous states within the South African confines, as far removed from what was realistically possible.⁹ Another important work which was consulted within this study was a doctoral dissertation written by the South African academic, Gideon van der Watt.¹⁰ The

⁷Hermann Giliomee, *The rise and demise of the Afrikaners*. (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2019), 34.

⁸ Richard Elphick, *The equality of believers: protestant missionaries and the racial politics of South Africa*. (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2012), 235.

⁹ Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: biography of a people*. (Cape Town: Tafelberg publishers, 2012), 484.

¹⁰ Gideon van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener: koersaanwyser in die Nederduitse Gereformeerde kerk se sending en ekumene*. (D.Th, University of the Free-State, 1990),

dissertation, which entails a biography of Gerdener, documents his life and work as an ecumenical leader within the DRC and presents his story within a clear and chronological manner. One area within this field which seems to be lacking, and one which this study respectively intends on addressing, is placing Gerdener within the complex context of his time. For example, Gerdener was active during the Anglo Boer War, both World Wars as well as a dramatic cultural evolution within the Afrikaner nation. Coupled with this was the rise of a political Afrikaner nationalism which set the political arena alight and was further complicated by the national and political awakening amongst the African nation, and later the coloured nation. All these developments carried repercussions for race-relations in the country and being in a position of leadership, Gerdener was forced to react in some form or another. This study, then, aims to investigate Gerdener's role and response at these points of contact and in so doing aspires to illuminate certain elements of his character and racial policies which may serve to inform our understanding, and in no way to defend or apologize.

The first chapter of this study sets out to lay the conceptual foundation for the rest of the work. It focuses on the early influences which served to form Gerdener's initial world-view and which proved to remain instilled in his psyche throughout his life. The chapter following documents several important shifts in Gerdener's life as he transitioned into his role as DRC minister, as well as his ardent contributions to the developing Afrikaner cultural identity. Chapter three marks yet another influential development in Gerdener's story with his acceptance of the calling as tertiary educator. This chapter also traces a theme of progression: comprised of both theological and missiological evolution, as well as Gerdener's manoeuvring into a position of increased influence in ecclesiastical and secular realms. This leads into the final chapter, chapter four, which documents arguably the high point of Gerdener's public and political persona, ushered in by the early 1940s. Chapter four intends to show the determinative role Gerdener played in the racial policies of the Afrikaner government and the centrality which his missiology would enjoy in these strategies.

Chapter I: *The formative years (1881-1917)*

At a South African Union conference in 1960, Gerdener defined history within the following terms: “between decades past and those which lay ahead, there exists no abrupt disengagement, but rather an organic bond. The past must serve to better inform our understanding and wisdom of the present”.¹¹ Gerdener’s organic understanding of historiography serves as a valuable starting point in this study. As people who interact with our contextual surroundings we do not live within a vacuum, we both influence and are influenced by the societal construct within which we find ourselves. In other words, we are by and large by-products of our situation and heritage.

With that in mind, this chapter intends on firstly illuminating certain key aspects of the contextual foreground into which Gerdener would be born and which would have had an influential role to play in his initial orientation. This chapter will then follow Gerdener’s development from birth into a German missionary family, his early formative years as a student, through to his years as a leader within student movements until his eventual acceptance of a vocation to the Dutch Reformed pulpit.

A Rhenish-German start

During the final decade of the eighteenth-century, revival movements swept over Europe and a renewed interest in mission to the heathen world was sparked. Specifically, in Germany a progressive shift in religious emphasis was coupled with this missional revival; a shift away from rationalism and towards pietism. It was within this atmosphere that the Rhenish Mission Society (RMS) sunk in its roots. The impetus came in 1799 when a group of men formed a prayer union in the German town of Elberfeld with the intention of supporting the broad missional task.¹² In 1818 a mission society was formed in the neighbouring town of Barmen, which proved a fruitful endeavour as by July 1825 it could already inaugurate its own mission school. Due to the society in Barmen’s rapid expansion, support was needed from the group in Elberfeld as well as other smaller mission societies from the surrounds, such as Cologne.

¹¹GBA Gerdener, “Lesse uit die verlede,” In: *Uniale Sendingkongres van die N.G. Kerke van Suid-Afrika, Kroonstad, April 1960*. (Bloemfontein: N.G.S.P., 1960), 69.

¹²Elfriede Strassberger, *The Rhenish Mission Society in South Africa 1830-1950*, (Cape Town, C. Struik (Pty.) Ltd, 1969), 1.

Resultantly, these bodies were absorbed into the operation and on 23 September 1828 the Rhenish Mission Society was established with its headquarters in Barmen.¹³

Although the RMS was now established, it had no operational foothold abroad. During this time John Philip, the famous superintendent of the London Mission Society (LMS), was back in Europe and en route to return to the Cape with more English missionaries. Opportunistically the RMS management approached Philip with the request that the first four Rhenish missionaries accompany him on the three-month journey to the Cape. Philip gladly agreed and so it came about that the RMS set foot in the Cape in October 1829.¹⁴

Already during the long voyage to Africa, differences in missiological persuasion between the Germans and the English were palpable. Co-founder and pioneer of the Rhenish work in Wupperthal, Johann Gottfried Leipoldt, was of the opinion that mission work within a foreign context was to emanate from an independent and stationary mission institution. He became convinced of this while spending some time at the Moravian mission station in Genadendal before embarking on his own direction. At Genadendal, Leipoldt was inspired by the model of an autonomous mission station strictly governed along lines of order and personal spirituality. Upon leaving the Moravian mission station Leipoldt and Theobald von Wurmb, one of the initial four Rhenish Missionaries, went against strict instructions from RMS management and took a leap of faith by buying a farm in the valleys near present day Clanwilliam at the start of January 1830. Leipoldt named the farm in reminiscence of the Wupper Valley in Germany and began his lifelong work of developing an independent and self-sufficient mission station where heathens could be brought to faith and be morally enriched.¹⁵ The independence of Wupperthal made it unique within Rhenish mission endeavours as other early RMS ventures, such as in Stellenbosch and Worcester, were co-opted by other mission societies in the initial stages. However, its method of doing mission reflected the wider RMS ideals of personal conversion and pastoral care.

Leipoldt went about directing his mission station autocratically and placed the utmost emphasis on strict regulation. Biblically founded rules were established and any new applicant to the station was required to undersign a code of conduct before being admitted into the community. Apart from establishing a school and church, industries were created to stimulate independence which required the labour of the community and, in addition to this, each resident of Wupperthal was instructed to keep their hut and garden in pristine condition. The reason for such strict discipline, insistence on routine and hard labour was to radically change the

¹³Elfriede Strassberger *Die Verhaal van die ou Wupperthal (1830-1951)*, [DRC Archives in SA, G789 Wupp].

¹⁴GBA Gerdener, *Baanbrekersonder die suiderkruis*, (Stellenbosch, CSV of South Africa, 1941), 55.

¹⁵Strassberger, *The Rhenish Mission Society*, 44.

character of the residents. The gospel and Christian principles were consequently of primary concern in the Wupperthal operation so as to mould the moral fibre of the heathen inhabitants.¹⁶

With the emancipation of slaves in 1838 Wupperthal saw a renewed influx of residents, however this did not relate to a comparative increase in baptisms. The reason for this was that the Rhenish organization, especially under the leadership of Friedrich Fabri, warned against ‘stormy conversions’ and Leipoldt echoed this conservative path to baptism. As a result it took 5 years before Wupperthal saw its first baptism, and all candidates were first to go through a rigorous catechism process and tests of character before being accepted to the communion table.¹⁷ The number of congregants and communicant members steadily grew and by 1844 the number of those sharing in communion rose to 60, by the end of Leipoldt’s 32-year ministry 907 adults and children were baptized. He remained true to his calling and served Wupperthal until his death in 1872. Many years later, Gerdener would write sympathetically of the disciplined and orderly manner by which Leipoldt conducted his work and pondered the idea whether his present-day church had become too lax and as a result started to undermine the value of discipline.¹⁸

Mission work from the side of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa was also starting to gain momentum and in 1873 its first permanent domestic mission commission was established with William Murray as its chairman.¹⁹ It was in this same year that the Rhenish missionary Johannes Gerdener was sent from Germany to the isolated mission station of Wupperthal. 19th Century Christian missionaries are understood to have generally stemmed out of middle-class Europe, and Johannes was no exception as his father, Johann, was most likely a builder in Hollig, West Germany.²⁰ Johannes arrived in South Africa with the responsibility of replacing Leipoldt’s son, Johann Leipoldt who unsuccessfully attempted to lead the mission station after his father’s passing, as head missionary of Wupperthal. Johannes Gerdener took up the mandate with a child-like faith and understood it within the framework of a divine vocation.²¹ Apart from the conventional needs which often marked such isolated communities of the day, Johannes was faced with a community struggling from acute monetary scarcity and so sought to expand the work on the station both materially and spiritually. He engaged himself with an impressive work ethic which was in no small manner motivated by his worldview which maintained that God had intentionally placed him in that specific time

¹⁶Strassberger, *Die verhaal van ou Wupperthal*, [DRC Archives in SA, G789 Wupp].

¹⁷Strassberger, *The Rhenish Mission Society in South Africa*, 51.

¹⁸Gerdener, *Baanbrekers onder die suiderkruis*, 61/62.

¹⁹Gedenkskrif 1881-1956, uitgegee by geleentheid van die driekwarteeufesviering van die Ned. Geref. Sendingkerk in Suid-Afrika. [DRC Archives in SA, G 384 NGSK].

²⁰*Mission work and mission stations in the Western Cape, 1737-1911*. [DRC Archives in SA, B4779].

²¹Gideon van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener: koersaanwyser in die Nederduitse Gereformeerde kerk se sending en ekumene*. (D.Th, University of the Free-State, 1990), 17.

and place to do God's work.²² That being said, the large numbers of Johannes' congregation and the related missionary responsibilities were demanding. Shadowing the model set by Leipoldt, he managed his congregation of 700 members, 270 of whom lived at Wupperthal itself, autocratically and demanded adherence to his authority. Moreover, Gerdener embodied the Rhenish tradition of leading an exemplary devout personal life and conducted his ministry in a patriarchal manner. Johannes enforced strict routine, ensured regular Church attendance and made education compulsory for children.²³ Johannes' crowning achievement during his time in Wupperthal was a spiritual revival which swept through and around the mission station.²⁴

It was at this mission station of Wupperthal that Johannes Gerdener could write a letter to his brother in Germany on 27 May 1881, informing him that his third son was born on 30 March 1881 and was named Gustav Bernard August Gerdener.²⁵ The young Gerdener only lived in Wupperthal for 10 years, before moving to Tulbagh with his mother and siblings after his father passed away from throat cancer in 1891. However, the character of Wupperthal manifested in its pragmatism, independence, autochthonism, stern discipline and paternalism, as well as the RMS's support of the Afrikaner racial policy, left a lasting impression on Gustav. Several other components of Wupperthal's spirituality, such as its singing culture, remained with Gerdener throughout his life. Spiritual singing was a characteristic feature of the mission station and Gerdener would go on to write several noteworthy songs later in his life; amongst others were songs such as, *welkom, dierbaar Woord van God*²⁶, which was dedicated to the launch of the 1933 Afrikaans translated Bible, as well as *Hul boodskap: 1838-1938*²⁷, a song honouring the Voortrekkers and curated specifically for recitation at the Afrikaner's centenary celebration of the Great Trek. He would also play a central role in the reworking of the DRC song book which eventually became the Afrikaans Halleluja-book, during the start of the next Century.²⁸

Gerdener's maternal heritage was also steeped with missiological prestige. His mother, Maria Alheit, was the daughter of another Rhenish missionary, Christof Wilhelm Alheit. He was sent to South Africa in 1843 with the task of assisting one of the original four Rhenish missionaries, Gustav Zahn, in Tulbagh. Twenty-three years later and six years after the Rhenish Girls' school was founded, Alheit established a school in Dorpstree, Stellenbosch, for the

²²Strassberger, *Die verhaal van ou Wupperthal*, [DRC Archives in SA, G789 Wupp].

²³Van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener: Koersaanwyser*. 18.

²⁴Strassberger, *The Rhenish Mission Society in South Africa*, 54.

²⁵Letter from Johannes Gerdener, 27 May 1881. [DRC Archives in SA, PPV71].

²⁶Kerkbode, 16 August 1933. [DRC Archives in SA, PPV73]

²⁷Kerkbode, 14 December 1938. [DRC Archives in SA, PPV73]

²⁸Van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener: Koersaanwyser*. 7.

education of sons born to Rhenish missionaries. As principal, Alheit was known for his great educational skills and strict discipline.²⁹ Gerdener's mother was also the granddaughter of Michiel Christiaan Vos, the famous evangelical DRC minister in Tulbagh.

Gerdener was inspired by his great grandfather and singled him out next to Helperus Ritzema van Lier in South African church history, specifically labelling him a pioneer in DRC mission during a time of general religious disorder. After theological training from Utrecht University in Amsterdam, and several pulpit positions in the Netherlands, Vos returned to South Africa in 1793 and immediately incorporated missionary zeal into his ministry.³⁰ Vos' ministry, which incorporated slaves and servants, would have been considered radical at the time and expectantly won general disapproval from his white DRC congregation. This distaste conveyed by Vos's white congregation rested largely on the fact that Dutch colonists considered their Christian faith a social elevator. Thus, the Christian Dutch settlers feared that if their religion was broadened to include the native slaves, the delicacy of their social hierarchy would be threatened by the possibility of social equalization. On this point, the great Dutch Reformed churchman, Andrew Murray, honoured the work of Vos in 1927 when he noted that, "the warm attempt to educate slaves in Christian ways during the late 18th Century existed quietly through the sole ministries of Van Lier and Vos".³¹ Further, Vos' style of ministry was significantly juxtaposed to the dogmatism and rationalism which typified preaching in the Cape during this time, as he embodied a tradition of pietistic evangelism and personal pastoral care. He emphasized the practicability of the Bible and incorporated the heathen population in the great scheme of the gospel. However, Vos also remained true to his Calvinistic Reformed tradition.³² These characteristics would, to a large extent, also mark the way in which Gerdener conducted his ministry and formulated his mission ideals. Finally, it is important to note that in his historiographical orientation, Gerdener closely linked the ministry of Vos to the religiosity of the Great Trek which took place around 36 years after his ministry in Tulbagh; an event which Gerdener located as central in both the church expansion and nation building of the Afrikaners.³³

Together with his mother and siblings the young Gustav moved into the Alheit house in Tulbagh after his father passed away. Here Gerdener was incorporated into the Afrikaans community and the DRC. However his bond with the Rhenish tradition was never broken and

²⁹Strassberger, *Rhenish mission society in South Africa*. 31/32.

³⁰GBA Gerdener, *Bouers van weeler*. (Cape Town – Pta: NG Kerk uitgewers van SA), 14.

³¹A.C. Murray & J.W.L Hofmeyr, *Dagbreek in donker Afrika: 'n kort oorsig van die sendingwerk van die NGK in SA*. DRC General Mission Commission 1927), 7.

³²Gerdener, *Bouers van weeler*. 18

³³GBA Gerdener, *Bouers van weeler*. (Cape Town – Pta: NG Kerk uitgewers van SA), 11.

he associated himself with the RMS throughout his life. During his professional life, as theological professor and member of the *Teologiese Studente Sending Vereniging*, he would regularly lobby for the financial support of the RMS, amongst other “well-intentioned” societies.³⁴

These currents in Gerdener’s early upbringing impacted his character and left him humble, evangelistic and deeply religious with entrenched German discipline and a heart for people.³⁵ Further, the contrasting intellectual atmospheres represented by the two branches of his family tree, namely the German missiology of his father’s side and DRC evangelical tradition of MC Vos, greatly shaped Gerdener’s theology and missiology.

The epistemological foreground

Theological dogmatism and philosophical rationalism were by-products of the so-called Enlightenment period in Europe, which originated in the late 17th Century and persisted throughout the 18th Century. Already in its early development, the cold doctrinal and rationalized theology which this Age of Reason inspired met ecclesiastical opposition. A reaction most significantly spearheaded by the Lutheran pastor Philip Jakob Spener. Spener reaffirmed the broad doctrines of Lutheran Orthodoxy but differed from his denomination’s teachings on the responsibility of the individual Christian. On this matter he was more Calvinistic. In other words, Spener emphasized a personal and living faith coupled with biblical obedience and devotion, a movement which would come to be known as German Pietism. This pietistic movement influenced a devoutly religious Lutheran by the name of Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, who studied under a follower of Spener, August Francke, at the University of Halle. Later, as a member of the court in Dresden, Zinzendorf allowed a group of Moravian exiles, who were Hussite in religious orientation, to seek asylum on his lands.³⁶ These exiles established themselves within their settlement of Herrnhut in 1722, and so inspired Zinzendorf that he left his secular post to join their community, and subsequently founded the Moravian Brotherhood.³⁷

Moravianism was fuelled by the pietistic movement and was largely juxtaposed to Orthodoxy in several ways: discipline over doctrine, individual experience over ecclesiastical authority, practice over theory, ecumenicism over exclusivism and evangelical urgency over

³⁴Meeting minutes of the management of the TSSV. [DRC Archives in SA, K-DIV2684], 21 March 1946.

³⁵Kerkbode, 23 August 1967, [DRC Archives in SA], 261.

³⁶Justo, L. Gonzalez, *The story of Christianity: Volume II*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2010), 260-263.

³⁷GBA Gerdener, *Two centuries of grace: 1737-1937*. (Stellenbosch: CSV association of SA, 1937), 14.

egotistical ministry. Zinzendorf's pietism carried an emotional emphasis which underscored individual decisions and as a result rejected the concept of group conversions. This introduced an anti-establishment element into Zinzendorf's missiology which was removed from the idea of instituted mission churches being the end goal of mission work. To his mind mission work was organic and rather the activity of a revived community within the church, an *ecclesiola in ecclesiae*, under the inspiration of Christ. As such he introduced the concept of voluntarism into mission as opposed to a formal ecclesiastical character.³⁸ This new Moravian movement also provided the first missionaries to South Africa in the form of Georg Schmidt in 1737, and later again in 1792, when the Moravian mission work was re-started in South Africa after Schmidt was forced to leave his work in 1744. The reason for his expulsion hinged once again on the country's racial politics as his ministry proclaimed the same grace to the Khoisan as to the white and so posed a possible threat of destabilizing the colonial society's social structures.³⁹

M.C. Vos subscribed to this pietistic evangelism and was instrumental in the establishment of the pietistic *South African Mission Society* in 1799. Ironically with the help of the liberally inclined London Mission Society missionary J.T. van der Kemp.⁴⁰ One final fact regarding Moravianism and its influence in South African mission work worth mentioning, is that Vos had close ties with the Moravian missionaries as well as with the RMS which, specifically Wupperthal, was largely shaped by the Moravian model. Pietism was therefore an incentive to the missional awakening of the 19th Century, but the form in which it infiltrated the DRC of that Century was not of a purely pietistic nature.

Pietism underwent a number of changes throughout the 1800s. Both as a result of and in reaction to the Enlightenment and Renaissance, a new current emerged in Europe which shifted the seat of authority away from the king towards the people. The French Revolution was a catalyst in this change, and it was out of this event that the concept of 'nationalism' first emerged. This school of thought, which became known as Romanticism, found momentum especially in Germany, where the character and identity of a *volk* was emphasized and further understood within a historical framework. The German romanticist J.G Herder emphasized the concept of *volk* and argued that a nation could most thoroughly identify itself through a common language. Romanticism was further entwined with a Western conviction of cultural superiority and coupled with a sense of divine election which manifested in a belief that

³⁸David J. Bosch, *Transforming mission*. (New York: Orbis books, 2011), 258-259.

³⁹Richard Elphick, *The equality of believers: protestant missionaries and the racial politics of South Africa*. (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2012), 14.

⁴⁰Gerdener, *Two centuries of grace*, 31.

Westerners were the chosen bearers of Christianity to the ends of the Earth.⁴¹ Soon the concepts of Christianization and civilization would go hand in hand and as the 19th Century progressed, and with colonialism intensifying, this thinking would impress itself onto missional and national consciousness in South Africa. Karl Graul, founder of the Leipzig Mission Society, was an early proponent of this German emphasis on nationhood and, in contrast to Zinzendorf, defined the planting of ethnically autonomous and indigenous churches as the end goal of mission work. This insistence on distinguishing groups along ethnic lines and the preserving of indigenous identities, which these theorists often dubbed as the ‘*volkseie*’ of a nation, would come to typify German thinking and missiology; especially through thinkers such as B. Gutmann, J.G. Fichte and J. G. Herder. However, this philosophical trend was not limited to Germany, similar theories were put forward by the Englishman Henry Venn and the American Rufus Anderson.⁴² This demarcated an important shift in missiological agenda as the 18th Century pietism’s emphasis on individual souls made room for the nationalistic framework of the following century.

Pietism and Romanticism would merge most profoundly in the Rhenish and Berlin mission societies, specifically through the Rhenish missiologist Gustav Warneck. Often referred to as the father of protestant missiology, Warneck was attracted to pietism during his University years. However, his pietistic orientation would undergo romantic developments by the time he exerted his greatest influence (1897-1908). As colonial energy intensified in Germany during the latter half of the 19th century, especially as espoused by the RMS inspector Friedrich Fabri, Warneck realized the important role missionary work would play in a colonial era. Fusing his pietism with the new direction espoused by German Romanticism, he understood the ultimate task of missionary work to be the Christianization of entire peoples, and not individual conversions. The intention of this ‘*Volkschristianisierung*’ was to bring non-Christians to Jesus under a paternalistic banner. In other words, the newly converted indigenous people were to be incorporated into missionally planted churches. These congregations were then to be nurtured by European missionaries until they were deemed mature enough in both faith and character to govern themselves. The goal was not to Europeanize or Americanize indigenous people, but rather to establish daughter churches which were to grow and develop within their own historical, ethnic and cultural orientation, towards ultimate independence.⁴³ Bruno Gutmann took this idea further by arguing that missions should strengthen the organic

⁴¹Bosch, *Transforming mission*, 305 – 306.

⁴²David, J. Bosch. *Witness to the world: the Christian mission in Theological perspective*. (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1980), 134.

⁴³Hans Kasdorf, *Gustav Warneck: His life and labour*. (Missiology: An International Review, 1980).

national life of Africans. Speaking of the ‘primeval bonds’ of Africans, Gutmann said that Christianity should not break but rather take root within them.⁴⁴ This was partly in reaction to the threat of denationalization which colonialism posed for indigenous cultures. Consequently, and largely due to the influence of Romanticism, the concept of *volk* merged with religion and the church was increasingly understood as a cultural and ethnic extension of a nation, leading to the emergence of a *volkskerk*. By the late 19th Century these ideas would begin to influence DRC missional thinking.

This missiological formula, which taught that mission churches were to gradually become autonomous under paternalistic guidance, further structured along ethnicity and focused on preserving the ‘national soul’ of different peoples, would noticeably pilot Gerdener’s personal missiology. As these currents were unfolding in Europe, the president of the South African Republic (ZAR) in the country’s interior, Paul Kruger, was defining his people’s identity and future along similar lines. In speeches to his followers, Kruger would repeatedly compare the Voortrekkers to the Hebrews of the Old Testament and referred to the Afrikaners as “God’s people”.⁴⁵ Similarly, when speaking of nationality and identity, largely due to this Romantic influence, Gerdener also placed a remarkable emphasis on history and would further align the Afrikaner present with its past. This resulted in the Voortrekker story and its associated covenantal theology playing a central part in Gerdener’s psyche.

Meanwhile, in the Cape, a tactical victory by the so-called orthodox group over the liberals led to the founding of the DRC Seminary in Stellenbosch in 1859. Its founding lecturers, John Murray, brother of Andrew Murray Snr, and N.J. Hofmeyr, were part of a long tradition of ministers who received their theological training in Utrecht, Netherlands.⁴⁶ Others who would influence Gerdener, such as Andrew Murray Jr, J.I. Marais and J. du Plessis, also stood in this tradition. During their studies in Amsterdam these men were influenced by the *réveil* movement, which stood opposed to the liberal rationalism sweeping through Europe and called for a return to ‘pure’ reformed faith and Calvinistic principles. In his inaugural speech at the Seminary’s opening, John Murray was clearly influenced by these traditions when he stipulated the institution’s intention: “to have a sombre practical character, founded on scholarly interpretation of the Bible and rooted in history”.⁴⁷ In keeping with this Utrecht tradition, N.J. Hofmeyr and the Murrays brought with them an evangelical zeal and a bearing

⁴⁴Elphick, *The equality of believers*, 173.

⁴⁵Hermann Giliomee, *Afrikaner nationalism, 1875-1899*, In: A History of South Africa. (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2014), 227.

⁴⁶Pieter Coertzen, *Teologie Stellenbosch 150+: die verhaal van teologiese opleiding op Stellenbosch-die mense en die geboue*. (Wellington: Bybel-Media, 2010), 6.

⁴⁷G.B.A. Gerdener, *die ontstaan honderd jaar gelede*. In: Feesuitgawe: Kweekskool, Stellenbosch (Kaapstad: N.G. Kerk uitgewers, 1959), 15.

which positioned mission as an inescapable task of the church. They fuelled the flames of the great religious revival in South Africa during the second half of the 19th Century, initiated by the Worcester conference of 1860. Andrew Murray was further deeply influenced by American evangelicalism and took Afrikaner piety into a revivalist direction coupled with an ecumenical spirit.⁴⁸ Romanticism also made its presence felt in the Seminary from the start; expressed through the words of J.I. Marais, one of the first professors in the faculty: “patriotism without piety is of little value”.⁴⁹ Therefore, the pietism which Gerdener would be exposed to in the DRC Seminary would be cast in a Reformed Calvinist mould and injected with an evangelical spirit stemming from the Dutch Réveil and American evangelical revivals.

The establishment of the Seminary took place two years after the DRC Synod made the decision to segregate the church. In the discussions leading up to this fateful decision, N.J. Hofmeyr provided a ‘middle way’ solution to overcoming the conflicting issues of missionary work and fear of *gelykstelling*. His solution proposed that each congregation would have both a minister and a missionary. The minister would preach in the church, with coloured members in attendance, while a separate chapel would be used by the missionary for the dissemination of religious instruction specifically tailored to the needs of the coloured population. At the 1857 Synod, after long discussions on the matter, a resolution was put forward by Andrew Murray Snr, which was accepted. His resolution spelled out that it was desirable and scriptural to absorb heathen members into existing congregations where possible. Additionally, however the church would grant permission to congregants who sought to enjoy their Christian privileges in separate buildings due to *the weakness of some*. Although this resolution permitted separate sacramental premises, it did not sanction segregated parishes. In this, Hofmeyr’s middle way was accepted. However the unfortunate addition of the words *weakness of some* would open the way for white prejudice and the eventual exclusion of coloured members.⁵⁰ On a missional front, the decision of 1857 extinguished large portions of white angst, and as a result black conversions and baptisms accelerated. By 1880 the DRC had links to 23 black congregations in the Cape and the synod decided to group them into a separate church, thus in 1881 the *Dutch Reformed Mission Church* was born in the Cape, largely due to the influence of Rev. Jacobus Pauw from Wellington. The mission church was, however, only superficially independent; the coloured congregations were still led by white ministers, dependent on the white DRC for financial support and stood under the veto right of the Home Missions Commission of the white

⁴⁸Elphick, *The equality of believers*, 41.

⁴⁹Lindie Korf, *Podium and/or Pulpit? DF Malan’s role in the politicization of the DRC*. (Historia. 52. 214-238), 218.

⁵⁰Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: biography of a people*. (Cape Town: Tafelberg publishers, 2012), 123.

DRC.⁵¹ This paternalistic structure within the mission church represented the ideology espoused by Gustav Warneck and would prove influential in the reasoning behind Gerdener's social segregation theories during the 1940s, specifically his concept of separate coloured areas.

These influences, currents and events laid the foundation upon which Gerdener's theology would develop. As a young boy he now entered Stellenbosch to begin his educational journey amidst these philosophical, historical and spiritual developments.

The Afrikaans Athens

With the help of a study bursary, Gerdener was able to leave his home in Tulbagh for the pursuit of education in the academic town of Stellenbosch. He completed his high school career at the Stellenbosch Gymnasium, an institution established by John Murray, N.J. Hofmeyr and J.H. Neethling in 1866 with the ideal of preparing pupils for the theological Seminary as well as for secular higher education.⁵² After matriculation in 1899 Gerdener enrolled for tertiary education at the Victoria College with the eventual aim of theological studies. Thanks to financial aid yet again, this time through a DRC commission appointed at the 1880 Synod, Gerdener began his studies at the Seminary in 1902, the same year the devastating Anglo-Boer war drew to a close.⁵³

Gerdener's time in Stellenbosch as a pupil and later as a University student, afforded him exposure to an international arena, especially through the *Christen Studente Vereniging* (CSV) with which he would be intimately involved throughout his life. The CSV found its origins in the *Studente Vrywilliger Beweging* (SVB) which was born out of the Princeton University revivals in America, led by Robert P. Wilder. Shortly after the start of these revivals, in 1886, D. L. Moody held the first international conference for Christian college students in Massachusetts, with the intention of inspiring missional interest. The devoted work of Moody and Wilder at this conference led to 100 young people undersigning and committing to the declaration of the movement which read: "We are willing and desirous, God permitting, to become foreign missionaries".⁵⁴ One of these first affiliates was John R. Mott, who would later become a great mentor to Gerdener. By 1888, fifty of these volunteers came together to

⁵¹Elphick, *The equality of believers*, 43.

⁵²I. L. Ferreira, *Die teologiese seminarium van Stellenbosch 1858-1963*. (Pretoria: Makro Boeke, 1979), 85.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 277.

⁵⁴C. M. de Villiers, *Die C.S.V en die sending*, In: *Vir Christus en die Jeug*. [DRC Archives in SA, CSV G535], 34.

formally organize the movement, and so the SVB was established under the slogan, “the evangelization of the world in this generation”, with Mott as its first chairman.⁵⁵

The heart of the voluntary movement was threefold. Firstly, to instil a burning missionary interest in the hearts of youths and to guide them towards a missionary commitment. Secondly, to educate and prepare these young candidates for their missionary life-task and to nurture this missionary zeal through a prayer-based spirituality. Finally, to inspire concrete action in missionary endeavours as well as in the spreading of the missionary flame amongst others. To this end the movement made use of its declaration as a public affirmation of the candidate’s commitment to the missionary cause and acted as a pilot for the conscience, intent on holding the volunteer accountable to their missionary pledge.⁵⁶ Four years after the movement took root in North America and Great Britain it reached South Africa. In 1890 Miss Abby P. Ferguson, one of the founders of the Huguenot Seminary for girls, started the first volunteers group at the Huguenot Seminary in Wellington. The movement quickly spread and in 1893 the SVB in South Africa also federated with G. Ferguson, the first Wellington Mission Institute teacher appointed by Rev. A. Murray in 1877, as chairman.⁵⁷ Together with other influential churchmen, such as A.C. Murray and C.H. Murray, Gerdener undersigned the declaration of the South African SVB as a young boy, “it is my life-goal to, God permitting, become a missionary amongst the heathen world”,⁵⁸ and thus received his membership card confirming his affiliation to the organization.

The following year Miss. Ferguson attended a students’ convention in Northfield, U.S.A. Here she was greatly impressed by L.D. Wishard, the world secretary of the movement at the time, and approached him to visit South Africa. He, together with Mott, expressed a desire to begin work in South Africa and a committee consisting of N.J. Hofmeyr, J.I. Marais, C.F.J. Muller, J.H. Neethling, G.R. Ferguson, Miss Bliss and Miss Ferguson was promptly set up to arrange the visit. In June 1896, Wishard arrived in Wellington and from the 24th to the 29th of July a large Students’ Conference was scheduled to be held in Stellenbosch. The travels of Donald Fraser, leader of the British equivalent to the CSV, coincided with the Stellenbosch conference and so, along with 400 young people, he attended the conference held in the Bloemhof Hall with the Rev. Andrew Murray presiding as chairman. The conference was led from a prayerful foundation and was conducted in a serious manner which emphasized evangelical spirituality. With this same earnest focus on Christ, the CSV constitution was

⁵⁵C. M. de Villiers, *Die C.S.V en die sending*, 34.

⁵⁶D. Willard Lyon, *The volunteer declaration*. [DRC Archives in SA, B3101].

⁵⁷A. Dreyer, *Historisch Album van De Nederduitsche Gereformeerde Kerk in Zuid Afrika*, (Kaapstad: Cape Times Beperkt, 1910), 113. [DRC Archives in SA, G161 NEDG].

⁵⁸*Die Studente Vrywilliger-Beweging van Suid-Afrika, 1927*. [DRC Archives in SA, B4560]

drawn up by a designated committee guided by Fraser and Wishard. The constitution was subsequently accepted at the end of the conference and as a result the South African CSV was established in July 1896.⁵⁹ It was also decided that the SVB would be integrated into the CSV, as was made clear under Article II of the CSV constitution: “To influence students to devote themselves to the extending of the Kingdom of God in their nation and throughout the world; for this purpose the Student Volunteer Movement is to be promoted as an organic part of the Association ”.⁶⁰

Gerdener was fifteen years old when he attended this founding conference of the CSV and it would profoundly crystallize his young faith. Gerdener was formally introduced to the spirituality embodied by Rev. Andrew Murray, which subsequently set the course for his entire religious life. Murray emphasized prayer and his insistence on invoking religious revival was a theme repeatedly employed in Gerdener’s own ministry.⁶¹ An ecumenical atmosphere prevailed throughout the student conference, which represented 29 different institutions and nine denominations.⁶² The exposure to this ecumenism was another lasting influence in Gerdener’s life, especially considering the fact that during this same year another significant event which sent shock waves through Afrikaner nationalism took place. At the beginning of 1896, in an attempt to oust the Transvaal government, Cecil John Rhodes and Dr. L. Jameson planned to incite a riot amongst the *Uitlanders* (British people) in the Transvaal. In the resulting chaos, it was planned that British troops would swoop in and take control of the ZAR. This failed miserably. Conversely, the British blunder cultivated new energy within a rising Afrikaner nationalism and created a rift between the British and the Afrikaner population. This would become all the more extensive with the involvement of Alfred Milner in 1897, and the eventual war which began in October of 1899.⁶³

The CSV was not the first or in fact the only Christian student organization in Stellenbosch. Prof. N.J. Hofmeyr began serving the spiritual needs of students from 1874 when he instituted his bible study group *Christelijke Jongelingen Vereniging*.⁶⁴ The CSV was, however, the most successful student organization and quickly held a position of high influence amongst South African students and during his University years Gerdener was closely involved with the CSV. During the difficult years of war, friction between Afrikaners and English was ubiquitous and the CSV periodical, *The Christian Student*, was declared contraband. On one

⁵⁹A. P. Ferguson, *In the beginning*. In: Vir Christus en die Jeug. [DRC Archives in SA, CSV G535], 4.

⁶⁰Constitution of the Students’ Christian Association of South Africa. [DRC Archives in SA, B5206].

⁶¹Van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener: Koersaanwyser*. 34.

⁶²F.J. Liebenberg, *’n halweeeu onder die jeug van Suid-Afrika*. In: In: Vir Christus en die Jeug. [DRC Archives in SA, CSV G535], 9.

⁶³Fransjohan Pretorius, *Everyone’s war: the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902)*. In: A history of South Africa. (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2014), 241.

⁶⁴C.J.V reports. [DRC Archives in SA, GEM-K 3481].

occasion Gerdener even had to help burn thousands of copies. However, the CSV survived this time of trial and even sparked a missional interest within youths, especially those who were sent to prisoner of war camps overseas, such as St. Helena, where A.F. Louw was a minister.⁶⁵

This great evangelical and missional emphasis within student movements should also be understood within the framework of the so-called missionary problem around the turn of the century, in which the church had a burning desire to convert the whole world but was often hindered by a lack of resources and labour. In 1901, Andrew Murray addressed this problem with his typical fiery evangelicalism. Following the thoughts of Warneck, Murray believed mission to be the chief task of the church and suggested strategies to help combat the missionary problem. Some of these suggestions included training students in an atmosphere of missionary enthusiasm, pastors to take the lead in making Christ known to every creature, circulating missionary literature and organizing young people to be missionally awakened and prepared. However, behind all this Murray noted a deeper need for spiritual revival.⁶⁶ During a speech presented in 1918, Gerdener would address this exact problem, which was still rampant in the DRC. In this speech he reiterated what Murray said in 1901 and identified a deeper spiritual poverty within the church as the cause of the problem. He addressed the adult population and called for young people to be encouraged and better equipped to take up the missionary task.⁶⁷ Thus, a great emphasis was placed on inspiring the younger generation's missional interest through the various student organizations.

At the DRC Seminary, Gerdener had four lecturers; N.J. Hofmeyr, J.I. Marais, P.G.J. de Vos and C.F.J. Muller. Biblical text formed the bedrock of the curriculum. New and Old Testament subjects were divided between all four professors, ensuring that the Bible would have been emphasized in all aspects of theological training.⁶⁸ Gerdener received church polity under P.G.J. de Vos and during these classes he was influenced by the Scottish Presbyterian model of church order.⁶⁹ This church model in which a congregation was understood as a self-governing body, while its freedom and independence were restricted by the freedom and independence of other congregations, was taken up by Gerdener. In other words, the church was structured in a tiered manner, with the Synod having judicial authority.⁷⁰ This had immense implications in the way Gerdener would later conceptualize the relationship between the DRC and its mission churches, in which he justified the dictatorship of the mother church over the

⁶⁵G.B.A. Gerdener, *Moeilike tye in die C.S.V.* In: Vir Christus en die Jeug. [DRC Archives in SA, CSV G535], 52.

⁶⁶Andrew Murray, *The key to the missionary problem*. (London: James Nisbet & Co. Limited, 1901), 2-19.

⁶⁷G.B.A. Gerdener, *De behoefte aan wel toegeruste arbeiders – Onze grootste nood thuis*. In: De Zending Crisis. (Kaapstad: Algemeene Zending Commissie de N.G. Kerk, 1918), 29.

⁶⁸Ferreira, *Die teologiese seminarium van Stellenbosch*, 140.

⁶⁹Van der Watt, *G.B.A. Gerdener: Koersaanwyser*. 78.

⁷⁰G.B.A. Gerdener, *Handboek by die kerkisasie*. (Kaapstad-Pretoria: N.G. Kerk uitgewers, 1927), 305.

young mission church. In this structure Gerdener disregarded the rule of Christ over individual congregations through Word and Spirit, as he saw the mother DRC as having the responsibility of determining when the mission churches were ready for independence. The Seminary also awoke in Gerdener a love for history, specifically through N.J. Hofmeyr's modules on church history. Here Gerdener developed a philosophy in which history played an instrumental part in the process of building national consciousness and pride. History, missiology and theology would resultantly become entwined in Gerdener's work and he would go on to invest a lot of energy into raising the historical awareness of the Afrikaner people in a way which painted church history and volk history as one.⁷¹ Through these tendencies, the marks of German Romanticism clearly showed their influence on Gerdener's development.

All of Gerdener's theological professors fell under the Reformed evangelical banner, shaped by the Revéil movement, German Pietism and the American Great Revivals. Theologically, Gerdener was formed within this mould and later, during the years of doctrinal upheaval in the DRC, this theological orientation of his would be tested. Although evangelical, Gerdener considered himself a Calvinist, however not in the Kuyperian guise of Neo-Calvinism. Gerdener placed great emphasis on Calvin's pious life and accepted most of his teachings including the infallibility of biblical text.⁷² Gerdener's Calvinism would be brought to the fore during the DRC church case against his colleague and friend, Johannes du Plessis, which we will turn to later. At this point it suffices to mention one significant theological difference between Gerdener and du Plessis, which concerns the complicated doctrine of predestination. Du Plessis downplayed predestination as leaving no room for mission and rather emphasized the free will of humanity.⁷³ Gerdener, on the other hand underscored the doctrine and, with reference to Article 16 of the then DRC faith confession, argued that predestination represented Gods' compassion and justice. Compassion: "God, out of pure grace and in accordance to His own free will, destines some people to be saved", and Justice: "while leaving the others to the righteous judgment of which they themselves are to blame".⁷⁴ In this, Gerdener emphasized the Calvinistic principle of God's sovereignty in making this decision even before the foundation of the world was laid.⁷⁵ Gerdener was able to make room for mission in this seemingly contradictory doctrine by arguing that the fruit of salvation applied to the elect and non-elect in different manners. Salvation came to its fullest benefit in the elect, however applied only restrictively to the non-elect, who were rather given the choice to accept

⁷¹Van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener: Koersaanwyser*, 110.

⁷²Van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener: Koersaanwyser*, 78.

⁷³G.B.A. Gerdener, *Die boodskap van 'n man*. (Stellenbosch: CSV, 1927), 162

⁷⁴Gerdener, *Handboek by die kerkisasie*, 245.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 246.

or reject salvation once the choice was brought before them. When Gerdener, however, put on the preachers' gown he would take up a more dynamic position. In a sermon on John 3:16, which he presented during the 1950s, Gerdener depicted God's love as so wide that it encompassed all people, irrespective of race, order or language. He even went further to say that if there were people living in undiscovered parts of the universe, whose souls were created by God, they too would be included in the eternal promise.⁷⁶ This represented a certain tension in Gerdener's theology. On the one hand he was the author of the catechism book of the DRC in which the doctrine of predestination was championed; and on the other hand, he preached of a love which was not necessarily race or culturally specific.

Gerdener can therefore be understood as an evangelical Calvinist and to this end was more influenced by American theologians such as prof. Z.M. Zwemer from Princeton, as opposed to reformed theologians from the Netherlands. Zwemer expounded Calvinism not as a static creed but rather as a kinetic missionary program.⁷⁷ Further placing Calvinism within his typical historical and cultural frame, Gerdener depicted Calvinism, and especially the doctrine of predestination, as a central life principle in the Afrikaner's heritage. A principle which he believed awoke within the Huguenots of the South and the Northern Voortrekkers, the realization of their stature and calling as the "volk of God... the representatives of a culture which included religion and met the glory of God".⁷⁸

Gerdener also involved himself in the social heartbeat of the wider Stellenbosch campus, which was often the nucleus of the institution. In 1905 he was Chairman of the English *Polumnia*, the Seminary's newspaper and also served on the editorial board of the *Students' Quarterly*, the newspaper of the Victoria College.⁷⁹ He was an avid sportsman and member of several different student societies. His involvement in these societies grew to the point that he eventually became chairman of both the popular Union Debating Society and the Student Representative Council during his student years.⁸⁰

Gerdener's diligent and disciplined character naturally led to excellence in academics. In 1904 he received his M.A. degree from the University of the Cape of Good Hope, in the department of mental and moral sciences. The following year he passed his theological candidate's exam with a percentage of seventy-eight and received his deed of acceptance into the ministry on the 15th of December.⁸¹ Notably, he graduated from the Seminary a year after

⁷⁶Sermon on John 3:16, [DRC Archives in SA, PPV75].

⁷⁷Van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener: Koersaanwyser*, 55.

⁷⁸G.B.A. Gerdener, *Ons protestantse erfenis*. (Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers), 40.

⁷⁹Ferreira, *Die teologiese seminarium van Stellenbosch*, 200.

⁸⁰Kerkbode 1933, 4 January. [DRC Archives in SA, PPV73].

⁸¹Acte van toelating, *private collection*. [DRC Archives in SA, PPV77].

D.G. Malan and together with D. Lategan. Both would later also become professors at the Seminary, but as proponents of the neo-Calvinistic stream, an orientation to which Gerdener never ascribed.⁸² In 1905 Gerdener was legitimized as a DRC minister and now found himself at a crossroads, the decision of which would send his life down a unique path.

DRC or Ecumenicism

Two contrasting career options now confronted Gerdener; one was a call to the Transvaal DRC congregation of Heidelberg and the other was as CSV general secretary, offered to him by the chairman, J.F. Naude. After prolonged consideration, Gerdener came to a decision and took up Naude's offer, a position which he held for over six years.⁸³ After Gerdener's dismissal of the Heidelberg vocation, the young D.F. Malan, who would later lead the Afrikaner nationalists to victory in 1948, took this vacancy as minister. The magnitude of Gerdener's decision and what it would mean for his evolution can be illuminated by briefly comparing his path with that of Malan's. Seven years separated the two theologians, who both followed similar academic routes which resulted in analogous intellectual backgrounds. Both championed a form of Voortrekker inspired paternalistic Christianity, neither of them ascribed to neo-Calvinism and both leant toward a modernist theological stream.⁸⁴ One point of difference between the two churchmen was that Gerdener was not a polemicist. When looking at the different theological debates of the day, which pivoted around Higher Criticism and the social gospel, Gerdener did not seem to fit comfortably into either side of the argument, whereas Malan publicly supported both these facets of the so-called modern theological trend. As will be made clear later, Gerdener's theological convictions were dictated by his principal end of mission and evangelism.

In Heidelberg Malan's Afrikaner-centrism, which was already fairly well established, would be intensified as he was exposed to a war-torn community, where the devastating results of the Anglo-Boer war were glaringly tangible. Malan was exposed to an intense nationalism in the Transvaal and his experience here would make his nationalism all the more acute.⁸⁵ Gerdener, on the other hand, was exposed to an international, interdenominational and ecumenical stage set by the World Student Christian Federation (WCSF) and it could be argued

⁸²Ferreira, *Die teologiese seminarium van Stellenbosch*, 151.

⁸³Van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener: Koersaanwyser*, 35.

⁸⁴Lindie Koorts, *DF Malan and the rise of Afrikaner Nationalism*. (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2014), 372.

⁸⁵Jacques Pienaar, *DF Malan the DRC minister: A biographical study of the intellectual and theological rationale of DF Malan, 1874-1912*. [DRC Archives in SA, PPV 1599].

that this environment filtered in a more moderate accent to Gerdener's nationalism during a time when extreme nationalistic sentiments were gaining traction within Afrikanerdom.

Concurrently, when Miss. Ferguson and Rev. Murray appealed for L.D. Wishard's South African visit, wider plans for student unification were being put in motion. In 1894, John R. Mott was seized with the idea of unifying the Christian students of the world. Mott was not unique in this desire but rather in his strategy. Differing from pioneers in student unification such as D.L. Moody and L.D. Wishard, who attempted to unite students under one name, the Young Men's Christian Association, Mott urged students to form independent national Christian movements of their own. These would be adapted in name, organization and activity to their unique character. These separate national organizations would then simply be linked to an effective federation.⁸⁶ Wishard was appointed by the North American Student Movement to join Mott on a world tour with the goal of planting the seeds for the WCSF. After gaining the affiliation of the Great Britain and German Student Movements, a high point was reached in Scandinavia in August of 1895. At the Scandinavian Student Movement's meeting, Mott placed before the delegates his ideal of a federation. He went further by encouraging them in their student work: "to broaden their scope, engage in evangelism and emphasize mission".⁸⁷ His plea was met with full endorsement and during the closing of the conference six men representing Germany, two from the Scandinavian movements, Great Britain, North America and the mission lands busied themselves with establishing the constitution of the WCSF, which would serve until the federation's first meeting in 1897. As a result, Mott's dream was realized when the WCSF was established on 17 August 1895 under three 'objects':

1. To unite Student Christian movements or organizations throughout the world.
2. To collect information regarding the religious condition of the students of all lands.
3. To promote the following lines of activity:
 - a. To lead students to become disciples of Jesus Christ as only Saviour and as God.
 - b. To deepen the spiritual life of students.
 - c. To enlist students in the work of extending the Kingdom of Christ throughout the world.⁸⁸

⁸⁶John R. Mott, *The World's Student Christian Federation*. (WSCF, 1920), 3.

⁸⁷C. Howard Hopkins, *20th Century Ecumenical Statesman John R. Mott*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 129.

⁸⁸Mott, *The World's Student Christian Federation*. (WSCF, 1920), 6.

As Wishard was the WCSF's representative for mission lands, he was sent as the delegate to South Africa. At the inaugural meeting of the CSV in 1896, the South African Student Movement was added to the list of affiliates.

As Secretary of the South African branch Gerdener came into intimate contact with the WCSF, its leaders and its diverse representatives. Apart from its intensely evangelical nature and its world-wide scope, the WCSF set out guiding principles on how it was to manage itself in relation to its affiliates. Three of these principles stood out for Gerdener and he would go on to make them his own. Firstly, the Federation was strictly interdenominational and interconfessional. The Federation made this principle strikingly clear when it was compelled to engage with Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic countries. During the 1911 WCSF Conference in Constantinople, at which Gerdener was a speaker, it was declared that no one who agreed with the Federation's basis should be excluded from membership, no matter their Christian orientation. Secondly, the WCSF recognized the independence, individuality and autonomy of each national movement, promoting the indigenization of Christianity. Mott explained it this way: "each national movement has its own distinctive contribution to make to the life of the whole Federation, and the more true it is to God's dealing with its own people and to their temperament and outlook, the more helpful will this contribution be".⁸⁹ In other words, Mott's evangelism was not a transportation of Western Christianity onto non-Western cultures, but rather sought that the Christian faith be transformed in its interaction with non-Western cultures. Christianity was not to denationalise people but was rather to take root within the soil of their national life.⁹⁰ Finally, an interdependence and mutual obligation existed between the different self-sufficient movements, with the Federation playing an advisory role.⁹¹

These guiding principles seem to have carried certain influence throughout Gerdener's life, notably in the strategies he would propagate through the DRC's Federal Mission Council and his mission quarterly, *Op Die Horison*. This culture embodied by the WCSF, in which denomination and confession played a secondary role to evangelization, also made a mark on Gerdener's ecclesiology and missiology by introducing a form of collegialism. His view of the church was one of fluidity and functionality, where emphasis was placed more on believers united against heathendom, than on specific institutions.⁹² Gerdener emphasized the universality of the church, arguing that it was made up of a collection of individuals from all

⁸⁹Mott, *The World's Student Christian Federation*. (WSCF, 1920), 11.

⁹⁰Dale Irvin, "John R. Mott and World-Centered Mission." *Missiology: An international review* 12, no. 2. (1984), 158.

⁹¹Mott, *The World's Student Christian Federation*. (WSCF, 1920), 13.

⁹²Van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener: Koersaanwyser*, 79.

nations, bound together under the leadership of Christ. He would go on to say that, within the reality of human differences be it language, church polity, teachings or habits, this unity ought to be protected.⁹³ Later in his life, however, once he accepted the DRC pulpit, a shift towards a more rigid and traditional understanding of church structures occurred, as this came with the territory of being a DRC minister. Once in the DRC ministerial role he placed great emphasis on the responsibilities of presbyteries and likened them to the metaphor used in Isaiah of watchmen on the tower who were to look out for danger which threatened the church.⁹⁴ That being said, Gerdener maintained a certain opinion of the church as a world community and further ascribed to the German ideals of a people's church in that he believed ethnically specific and separate churches would best be able to serve both the needs of mission and a heterogeneous country.⁹⁵ As such Gerdener often referred to church and nation with identical cultural tones, most notably through his praise of the Afrikaner's unique historical calling, pioneering heritage and apparent heroic faithfulness which, to his mind, dictated their social organizing.⁹⁶ Although Gerdener believed the institutional church to be most suited to deal with the enormous task of mission, he would motivate mission societies and organizations, such as the *Vroue Sending Bond*, throughout his life and would cherish their ability to inspire and mobilize missionary fervour. These positions taken up by Gerdener were largely due to the influence of his German mission heritage and experiences in the CSV.

On the ground Gerdener focused on the secretarial task at hand and went about his responsibilities pragmatically. The study of scripture was at the heart of the CSV and so bible study groups were of pivotal importance to Gerdener. These study circles were led by teachers specifically trained in facilitating small groups.⁹⁷ Literature was required for both the educators and the students and Gerdener contributed significantly to this. He penned several CSV booklets on a range of topics, which were used as study guides. By his second term he had produced an impressive amount of these and notably a significant amount of them dealt with missional topics, such as *Het Groot Bevel*⁹⁸, *De Wereld en het Woord*⁹⁹ and *The Bible a missionary book*¹⁰⁰, to name but a few. Gerdener also served as editor of the CSV newspaper, *The Christian Student*, in 1909. The year prior to his editorship the newspaper included the

⁹³Gerdener, *Handboek by die Katkisasie*, 241.

⁹⁴Opening reason in a presbytery meeting, 8 September 1954. [DRC Archives in SA, PPV75].

⁹⁵Van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener: Koersaanwyser*, 80.

⁹⁶Gerdener, *Handboek by die Katkisasie*, 142.

⁹⁷Mott, *The World's Student Christian Federation*. (WSCF, 1920), 37.

⁹⁸G.B.A. Gerdener, *Het Groot Bevel: de Bijbelsegrondslag der Zending*. (Stellenbosch: CSV, 1908).

⁹⁹G.B.A. Gerdener, *De wereld en het Woord*. (Stellenbosch: CSV, 1908).

¹⁰⁰G.B.A. Gerdener, *The Bible a missionary book*. (Stellenbosch: CSV, 1908).

Dutch title, *De Christen Student*, which appeared next to the English title and would be published eight times a year.¹⁰¹

During his leadership in the CSV, Gerdener made it a priority to expand work amongst English, female and black students. As a result of his efforts, Oswin Bull was elected as traveling secretary for the English youth and by 1909 there were two women representing the CSV as traveling secretaries. Apart from this, Gerdener ascribed the lack of work amongst black students to the fact that they had little opportunity for tertiary education.¹⁰² This would mark the beginning of one of Gerdener's lifelong tasks, the establishing of separate black, and later coloured, universities.¹⁰³ However, in response to the current student issue Gerdener suggested that the work amongst black students should be conducted by a separate and largely independent section of the CSV. Aligned with the WCSF principles, these separate coloured and black CSV branches were to be adapted to their unique national character.¹⁰⁴ The first black CSV branch was quickly established at the Lovedale secondary school, and the first coloured branch would be established in 1935.¹⁰⁵

One way in which the WCSF promoted interaction between the different national affiliations was through international conferences, which granted Gerdener cosmopolitan travel as a South African representative. The first of these came in 1907 and would be the first international conference held in Asia, taking place in Tokyo. John R. Mott personally arranged for Gerdener's attendance of this conference as well as for him to visit student conferences at Northfield, Lake Geneva and student centres in Britain and Europe, as part of a study tour.¹⁰⁶ During this stint of travel Gerdener touched down in Holland, England, Canada, North America and Asia. This exposure afforded Gerdener first-hand contact with the theological streams dominating Europe at the time, as well as bringing him into contact with influential theologians, notably professor J.J.P. Valetton from Utrecht and Gustav Warneck in Halle. Attendees of the Tokyo conference numbered 627, with more than 500 from Japan. Delegates listened to addresses on topics ranging from science and Christianity, referendums, surveys of mission work across the world and emotionally charged sermons. Mott closed off the meeting with a motivation to go out and conquer the heathen world.¹⁰⁷ Evangelism was a core topic, and practically included in the conference proceedings. Once the formalities had concluded, Mott led a pre-planned evangelism campaign with the intended purpose of "catching the ear of the

¹⁰¹F.G.M. du Toit, *Die CSV en sy tydskrifte*. In: *Vir Christus en die jeug*. [DRC Archives in SA, CSV G535], 36.

¹⁰²Van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener: Koersaanwyser*, 36.

¹⁰³ Federal Mission Council meeting minutes. 11-13 September 1945. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV226].

¹⁰⁴Gerdener, *Moeilike tye in die C.S.V.*, 52.

¹⁰⁵de Villiers, *Die C.S.V en die sending*, 34.

¹⁰⁶Hopkins, *20th Century Ecumenical Statesman John R. Mott*, 299.

¹⁰⁷Hopkins, *20th Century Ecumenical Statesman John R. Mott*, 316.

whole country”.¹⁰⁸ The conference was held within a tangible atmosphere of Christian brotherhood, in which diversity was transcended through a united front.¹⁰⁹ Gerdener would return to Stellenbosch extremely inspired by this experience.

In 1910, Gerdener attended the ground-breaking international mission conference in Edinburgh. The conference, held in the United Free Church of Scotland, was opened with an emotional statement in which Christ’s personal involvement in ecumenical mission work was emphasized as follows: “Christ views with gratitude the fraternal co-operation of so many Churches and societies... in the work of disseminating the knowledge and principles of Christianity by Christian methods throughout the world”.¹¹⁰ This conference left an indelible spiritual experience with attendees, including Gerdener, and would be described by many as being sacredly akin to ecumenical events, champions and gatherings of the ancient church.¹¹¹ Edinburgh took place six years after the General Mission Commissions was first convened in South Africa, which was tasked with organizing mission work in Southern Africa, and exemplified the missionary mood of the era: optimistic, pragmatic, impatient, triumphant and self-confident.¹¹² An astonishing functional unity was achieved amid the delegates, who represented 159 different protestant missions, which energized the missiological world. This lively reaction was principally due to the firm leadership of Mott, in a conference he referred to as “the most significant gathering ever held in the interest of the world’s evangelism”.¹¹³ This optimistic energy would, however, be strikingly stalled in the wake of World War I.¹¹⁴

The events of Edinburgh and its theme of conquering the world for Christ remained with Gerdener for many years, and it instilled in him a vision for the world’s need. A need which could only be satisfied through intense spiritual revival. One of Gerdener’s influencers, Gustav Warneck, was part of the more sober Continental Europeans and expressed suspicion over the flamboyantly activist approach taken by the Americans. He pointed out that Christ’s kingdom was to be spread diligently and precisely, whereas Mott formed part of a more charismatic stream, which professed that the evangelism of the world depended on their generation.¹¹⁵ Of these two opposing visions, Gerdener leaned more towards Mott’s urgency. After Edinburgh, Gerdener would again conduct a study tour abroad in which he completed a short course on tropical illnesses at the inter-denominational Livingstone College in London, a medical

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 314.

¹⁰⁹Van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener: Koersaanwyser*, 42.

¹¹⁰W.H.T. Gairdner, *Edinburgh 1910: an account and interpretation of the World Missionary Conference*. (Edinburgh: Turnbull and spears, 1910), 38.

¹¹¹Ibid., 37.

¹¹²Bosch, *Transforming mission*, 343.

¹¹³John R. Mott, *The decisive hour of Christian missions*. (Edinburgh: the foreign mission committee of the Church of Scotland, 1910), vii.

¹¹⁴Elphick, *The equality of believers*, 127.

¹¹⁵Bosch, *Transforming mission*, 340.

institution for missionaries. He then trekked through Muslim countries with the intention of expanding his knowledge of Arabic, Islam and the Qur'an, which would prove invaluable in later years.¹¹⁶

Upon his return to the Cape, Gerdener would also begin to gain prestige as a missiologist in his own right. As a mediator he lent assistance to Johannes du Plessis in the final preparation of his book, *A history of Christian Missions in South Africa*, which together with du Plessis' other volume *The Evangelization of Pagan Africa*, quickly became a standard textbook in a number of European and American Universities.¹¹⁷ When du Plessis' immensely popular book was reproduced 54 years later, Gerdener provided an introductory section in which he glorified the work and ranked it as first amongst the country's limited number of classics. This book did not only carry academic significance, but also a level of emotional weight for Gerdener, as he revered du Plessis, whose influence would play a significant role in the formation of his own thinking. The work and contributions of du Plessis clearly had a profound effect on Gerdener as reflected in the sentimental section which he included in the revisory introduction: "my own copy of the *History* is a complimentary one, dated 17th of July, 1911 and mentions 'gratitude for assistance afforded'".¹¹⁸

In 1911, Gerdener also published his first extensive missiological book, *Studies in the evangelization of South Africa*. Already in this publication his solution to the complex racial problems in South Africa was stipulated and he clung to these principles until his final days: "A wise, constructive policy of segregation is the only solution. But it must be positive and constructive... it must be a separation for growth, not for stagnation".¹¹⁹ Through another publication, which consisted of 70 pages of verse poetry, *Uit Mijn Jonkheid*, Gerdener fulfilled a childhood ambition of being both a poet and a preacher.¹²⁰ Paradoxically, this dual ambition was also a fundamental cause for criticism. In a review of his work Gerdener was criticized as being too moralistic, in that his inner preacher never allowed the reader to be transported above reality. With the stylistic elements out of the way, the critic went on to say, "Mr. Gerdener is a religious optimist... and his writing is always very polished, innocent and wholesome".¹²¹ Gerdener's vast arrays of poetic works reveal a deeply emotional and well-read man with a profound love for his birth land. This was mentioned in a different review which emphasized Gerdener's patriotism as well as his ambition to serve his *volk* both spiritually and

¹¹⁶Kerkbode, 4 January 1933. [DRC Archives in SA].

¹¹⁷G.B.A. Gerdener, *Die Boodskap van 'n man: Lewenskets van Prof. J. du Plessis*. (Stellenbosch: CSV, 1943), 130.

¹¹⁸Johannes du Plessis, *A history of Christian mission in South Africa*. Facsimile reprint.(Cape Town: C. Struik, 1965).

¹¹⁹G.B.A. Gerdener, *Studies in the evangelization of South Africa*. (London: Longmans Green, 1911), 21.

¹²⁰G.B.A. Gerdener, *Uit Mijn Jonkheid: Gedichten*, (London: Longmans Green, 1911)

¹²¹"South African verse." *The South African News Weekly*, 8 February, 1911. [DRC Archives in SA, PPV 73]

intellectually.¹²² From a young age Gerdener expressed his deep patriotism through poetry. During his student years he composed a poem called *Ons Land* under his alias “USFIN”, in which he sketched a glorified version of the arrival of Europeans in South Africa, and through this justified the Afrikaner claims to the land. He concluded this poem by pointing out the importance which Afrikaner *volk* unity, under God, would have for their survival.¹²³ Thus, while Gerdener was moving in international circles, his focus remained with South Africa and the future of his Afrikaner people.

During 1911 Gerdener also attended the WCSF’s conference in Constantinople. Ecumenicism once again prevailed in a conference which was strategically placed in the East, in order to pit itself against the threats of Islam. Consequently, it was within this conference that Gerdener’s interest in and convictions for the Muslim mission were affirmed. Further, at this meeting he acted within a leadership capacity and delivered an address in which he argued that the only answer to the world’s salvific cry was the involvement of each participant in the spreading of the kingdom. Only through this would spiritual revival flare up, and the world be evangelized in one generation.¹²⁴

Gerdener was immensely influenced by John R. Mott, the leader of the WCSF, and he developed a close personal relationship with this ecumenical stalwart and energetic evangelist. After his beginnings as an evangelist among American universities, Mott’s career soon widened in scope. At the peak of his influence Mott played a role within high profile circles such as the Whitehouse, during President Woodrow Wilson’s presidency.¹²⁵ Mott dedicated his life to Christianizing the world with an infectious impatience. Together with J.H. Oldham he formed the post-Edinburgh International Review of Missions (IRM), which aimed to continue the bond initiated at the 1910 conference and to carry out its ideals. In addition, the IRM was set up with an investigative intent into missional problems and to build up a ‘science of missions’. With regards to non-Western cultures the management of the IRM held to the principle of indigenization through the establishment of a self-sustaining and independent church.¹²⁶ It should be noted that what was emphasized here through the term ‘indigenization’ was religious unity, rather than ethnic separation, in which a growing nationalism amongst native peoples would be missionally nurtured.¹²⁷ The IRM later evolved into a permanent International Missionary Council (IMC) and in it Mott would address social and political issues

¹²²“Zuidafrikaanse Poezie.” *Uit Zuid-Afrikaan verenigd met Ons Land*, 15 April, 1911. [DRC Archives in SA, PPV 73]

¹²³“USFIN”, *Ons Land*. [DRC Archives in SA, PPV73].

¹²⁴Van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener: Koersaanwyser*, 45.

¹²⁵Elphick, *The equality of believers*, 128.

¹²⁶Greg Cuthbertson, “Globalizing and Christianizing racial segregation: South African debates,” In: *The International Review of Missions*, 1912-1934, 205

¹²⁷Irvin, *John R. Mott and world-centered mission*, 158.

alongside theological ones. This reflects the way in which the current of the Social Gospel, which gained momentum in the early decades of the 20th Century and sponsored concrete social change, seeped into Mott's missiology. However, evangelism would remain his primary concern and in the debate between the liberal Social Gospelers and the fundamentalists he would embody a neutral stance: "evangelism without social work is deficient; social work without evangelism is impotent."¹²⁸

Gerdener had reservations regarding the Social Gospel; he did not see the different dimensions of mission (evangelical, educational, social-welfare and medical) as being on an equal level. Evangelism was the primary goal of mission work, rendering the other elements of mission work subordinate to and merely "help mediums" to the goal of winning heathen souls.¹²⁹ Having argued this, Gerdener was not ignorant about the idea of social upliftment, but emphasized that this upliftment should develop as a branch of evangelism, as opposed to it being evangelism's end goal. He would regularly respond to social ills, such as in a sermon he delivered in 1920, in which he addressed the high level of alcoholism amongst the coloured community. The sermon took in a paternalistic tone, made the white community aware of the indirect influence which they had and used the story of Cain and Abel as a metaphor in describing the responsibility which white people had towards their coloured brethren. According to Gerdener, every soul was equal before God and social ills could be alleviated through good practical legislation.¹³⁰ In other words, Gerdener's missiology incorporated a certain system of priority when considering the different missional branches and their overall importance to mission work. Thus, although Gerdener was not a strong proponent of the Social Gospel, his mission interests would sporadically spill over into the secular realm, such as his sermon of 1920, which was an address of such significance and relevance that the Stellenbosch Church Council had it published and distributed.¹³¹

John Mott would also find inspiration in Gerdener and was deeply impressed by the young South African who was highly popular with students.¹³² One highlight in the Gerdener-Mott relationship was his visit to South Africa in 1906. In this time the CSV in South Africa was in a tender state due to the Boer War and the negative repercussions it had on the relationship between the English and Afrikaner portions of society. Behind the invitation and the organizing of the international evangelists' visit, lay some concentrated agendas. Gerdener pinned his expectations on the international stature of Mott, and nestled the hope that his visit

¹²⁸Mark Galli, "John R. Mott". In: *Christian History* 19, no. 1. (2000), 36.

¹²⁹Van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener: Koersaanwyser*, 82.

¹³⁰G.B.A. Gerdener, *Hoeder of Broeder?* (Stellenbosch: CSV, 1920)

¹³¹Stellenbosch Church Council meeting minutes, 7 June 1920. [DRC Archives in SA, GEM-K 2092].

¹³²Hopkins, *20th Century Ecumenical Statesman John R. Mott*, 299.

would have a positive influence in softening the bitterness held by Afrikaners towards the English, inspire missionary interest especially amongst Afrikaner students who's Calvinism still carried anti-missionary sentiments largely because it was anti-native, and contribute to opening doors for black and female students. Mott was deeply inspired by the Rev. Andrew Murray and met with the aging minister, to discuss the strategy of his tour, who left with the Mott party a "saintly impression."¹³³ The climax of Mott's visit was the Student Missionary Conference held in Cape Town between 17 and 20 May 1906 and in preparation for it Gerdener played a large organisational role. Mott addressed the conference six times and Rev. Murray twice. Mott spoke on a range of pragmatic and strategic topics as well as the role of women in the movements.¹³⁴ Murray spoke with a burning evangelical zeal emphasizing that Christ be placed in the centre of mission and that his reign was the link between God and a wretched world.¹³⁵ The greatest influence of this visit was, however, on Gerdener himself and although the campaign was considered a great success the tension between English and Afrikaans would continue to fester and reach boiling point after the Afrikaner rebellion of 1914.

In 1913 Gerdener married Johanna Schmolke, daughter of the Rhenish missionary Gustav Schmolke who replaced his father at Wupperthal. Following his marriage, Gerdener wrote a book called *Drempelvragen*, which reflected on his six years' work amongst students as CSV secretary as well as through his involvement in a weekly bible study group. Here he tackled common and complex questions held by students regarding faith.¹³⁶ This reflected another aspect of the student movement with which Gerdener was involved, namely an interest in literature. The WCSF and the CSV in South Africa played a large role in the development of missiology as a serious field of study and Gerdener would contribute to this culture in his pioneering missiological work.¹³⁷ This would ultimately culminate in the leading role which Gerdener played in the foundation of an independent seat for missiology in the Stellenbosch Seminary during the 1950s.

Gerdener then left his secretarial role for that of CSV chairman, a position which he would diligently fulfil until 1919 during a tense time both for the CSV and South Africa as a whole. The Union of South Africa was formed in 1910 with Louis Botha as Prime Minister, with its curatorship being largely the doing of Jan Smuts and the anti-Imperialist John X. Merriman. However, the optimistic intentions which galvanized the proposed Union were

¹³³Ibid., 295-296.

¹³⁴"The opportunity of the South African Student" *Report of the annual conference of the Student's Christian Association of South Africa*. (Paarl printing Co, Ltd, 1906).

¹³⁵Ibid., 96.

¹³⁶G.B.A. Gerdener, *Drempelvragen*. (Kaapstad: Holl. Afrik. Uitg. Mij., 1914).

¹³⁷Kerkbode, 20 September 1967, pg. 411.

largely unsuccessful. Three years of drought devastated the Free State farming industry, mines on the Witwatersrand were highly unstable and the way in which the Botha government suppressed the miner strikes of 1913 injected a spirit of militancy into the struggling Afrikaner worker class. Adding to Afrikaner feelings of resentment and estrangement was the Botha-Smuts government's pro-British stance, which painted the Union with the brush of reconciliation and emphasized South Africa's obligation to the empire.¹³⁸ These feelings erupted with a division within Afrikaner politics as J. B. M. Hertzog and Christiaan de Wet walked away from the South African Party in 1913, in order to form the National Party. Hertzog took a pro-Afrikaner position and promptly put forth his 'two streams' theory as South Africa's solution. Hertzog's theory advocated a paralleled society in which the English and Afrikaner populations could live alongside one another, in so doing protecting each culture and language from the threat of imposition. When war broke out in Europe, Botha and Smuts took measures to support the British campaign which included an order to invade German South West Africa. As Germany was a Boer sympathizer during the Anglo-Boer war, many Afrikaners disapproved and began planning a resistance movement. Adding fuel to the flames, the famous Boer general Koos de la Rey was accidentally hit and killed by a ricocheting bullet while on his way to a meeting to discuss the rebellion. Afrikaner rebels, however, saw this not as an accident but as an assassination and intensified their calls for revolution. As such, plans continued, and the Afrikaner rebellion was mobilized on the 9th of October 1914. Forces were led by Generals C.F. Beyers, Christiaan de Wet and other Boer leaders, who attracted young and poor Afrikaners with promises of a Boer republic and a better future. The rebellion party was further enlarged when a number of government officials like Manie Maritz, resigned their posts in favour of the movement. Smuts' newly assembled Union Defence Force (UDF) was compelled to take up arms against their fellow Afrikaners and the largely unorganized and under-resourced rebellion was easily squashed. There were, however, 190 rebel and 132 UDF troop casualties.¹³⁹ The rebellion was halted, but the schism it created seeped into every facet of society, and as CSV chairman Gerdener would need to deal with it directly.

Hertzog's two stream policy infiltrated the CSV and a number of its members rallied for the organization to be split from top to bottom, separated along the language contour. One proponent of separation was N.J. van der Merwe, a travelling CSV secretary from the Free State.¹⁴⁰ Van der Merwe, who was urged by Gerdener to accept the secretary position in 1913, despised the English faction of the CSV's antipathy towards the Afrikaans language and

¹³⁸Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 381.

¹³⁹Richard Steyn, *Jan Smuts: Unafraid of greatness*. (Johannesburg and Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2015), 67.

¹⁴⁰Van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener: Koersaanwyser*, 38.

culture. Using a biblical reference which would also be used by apartheid supporters from the North in the ensuing years, Van der Merwe cited the story of Babel as he argued that God's intention was always empire-breaking rather than empire-making. As a result, van der Merwe insisted that the CSV promote Afrikaner ideals and claim the right to openly propagate Afrikaner nationalism.¹⁴¹ This battle reached its climax at a conference held in Cradock in 1915. Gerdener, as chairman, toiled to keep the ecumenical and non-denominational character of the CSV intact and was pitted against the van der Merwe group who advocated for a complete split, with the Afrikaans section having a distinctive Christian-national stamp which would also make it exclusively DRC in confession. The issue came to a vote, and Gerdener's position of ecumenical unity won with a clean majority. This small victory was, however, conditional as the resolution included the requirement that travelling secretaries be bilingual and that individual CSV branches were to make room in their bible groups for both the country's languages.¹⁴² Gerdener saw nationalist sentiments, with their intention of isolation and division, as the greatest weakness of the CSV and dedicated himself to unity and ecumenism.¹⁴³ This reflected something of Gerdener's nationalistic principles at the time; he was no nationalist if it meant compromising the church's mission. He was first a missiologist and then a nationalist, a position which would generally guide his actions throughout his life, and would largely keep his nationalism from radicalisation.

During this time a further development which would have repercussions for the future of both Gerdener and Afrikaner nationalism, was taking place within the wider DRC. The DRC began taking a more concrete stance regarding Afrikaner and political issues. D.F. Malan, at that time still a minister in Graaff-Reinet, stated at a DRC conference in Bloemfontein in 1915 that apart from its calling as a Christian church, the DRC also had a calling towards the Afrikaner people. He continued to define this responsibility as being national in character and to promote a national awareness amongst Afrikaner people. As a result the idea of a *volkskerk* was further solidified.¹⁴⁴ This would pave the way for the DRC's involvement in racial politics, partly spearheaded by Gerdener and eventually culminating in the apartheid policy.

In 1919, in his final year as CSV chairman, Gerdener reported in a local newspaper that the organization was thriving and attributed its strength to the fact that it was run by and for the youth themselves. By now Gerdener was something of a youth specialist and, steeped in Mott's ecumenical tradition, would repeatedly suggest the unification of several of the youth

¹⁴¹G.D. Scholtz, *Dr. Nicolaas Johannes van der Merwe 1888-1940*. (Voortrekkerpers, 1944), 30.

¹⁴²Gerdener, "moeilike tye in die C.S.V." *Vir Christus en die Jeug*, 52.

¹⁴³Hopkins, *20th Century Ecumenical Statesman John R. Mott*, 300.

¹⁴⁴Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 385.

organizations in South Africa. He proposed that groups such as the Strevers, the C.J.V and De *Kinderzending Krans* unite under one banner; not in dependence on the church but rather in support of the church. He then went on to disagree with those who argued for the CSV to become church affiliated by stating that, as long as the CSV's terrain was in the bilingual state-school system, it could not be confessionally restricted.¹⁴⁵

During his official years at the CSV, Gerdener was also involved with pioneering work within the Muslim mission in the Cape. A calling which haunted him for years and was finally confirmed at the Constantinople conference of 1911, which had the Islamic threat to Christianity as one of its themes. In 1897 the DRC Synod began the process of organising its work within the Islamic coloured community, a movement which grew throughout the 19th Century as slaves saw Christianity as the religion of slave owners and so turned to Islam.¹⁴⁶ In 1912, a suggestion put forth to the DRC Synod by A.I. Steytler found fruition when the church mobilized its missional endeavour towards the Muslim community in the Cape. The Synod placed this branch of its work under the jurisdiction of the Cape Town presbytery, with Gerdener as its first missionary.¹⁴⁷ The work stretched from Cape Town to Simons Town, which housed around 20 000 Islamic coloured people, who were referred to as 'Slamschen'. This mission field was a challenging one for Gerdener as he faced a stubborn Islamic community and had his hands full with apostate Christians, who renounced Christianity for the Islamic faith. The "sorcery of the Muslim religion" was a daunting movement which claimed many and the Christian mission was further complicated by the temptations that came with Cape Town city living.¹⁴⁸ Gerdener's approach was saturated with lessons derived from his German missionary heritage. He took a paternalistic approach and placed great emphasis on the power of an exemplary and devoted personal life. Therefore, he believed that the Christian position would be strengthened against the Muslim threat through the elevation of coloured Christians' personal lives.¹⁴⁹ Another characteristic of Gerdener's approach to mission, that of patient dialogue, would come to light through his work in the Cape. Greatly influenced by the culture of the WCSF, Gerdener encouraged dialogue as a means of eradicating misunderstandings throughout his life. He held that one's opinion was not to be compromised, but that neither was that of the other. Rather, an understanding of different positions was to be achieved, respected and worked with. With regards to the Muslim mission this meant that the

¹⁴⁵Gereformeerde Maandblad. July 1919, 171. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 272].

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 100.

¹⁴⁷Box: *Kommissie – Sinodale Sending Kommissie*. [DRC Archives in SA, KS377].

¹⁴⁸De zaak des konings! [DRC Archives in SA, B2131].

¹⁴⁹De zaak des konings! [DRC Archives in SA, B2131].

Christian missionary was not to preach down to the Muslim, but rather to lend an attentive ear.¹⁵⁰ Gerdener's ecumenical heritage would inform him in this regard.

Within his missionary work Gerdener expressed a burning desire to establish a home for destitute coloured children, which he voiced to the DRC's domestic mission commission early on.¹⁵¹ Reminiscent of Leipoldt's faith driven purchase of Wupperthal, Gerdener followed through on this desire and bought a house in Virginia Street in district six, Cape Town, in 1916. This transaction took place purely on a foundation of faith and Gerdener placed his trust in God for the funding of the institution. The home was opened on the 27th of September with J.I. Marais delivering an inaugural speech.¹⁵² Its focus was on bringing individuals out of the Islamic influence, and so received the name *Uitkomst*. The home was quickly filled to capacity and from the start Gerdener expressed the intention of acquiring a larger property for the expansion of his work, a request which would be met in 1920 when a larger property was bought outside the city.¹⁵³ Although there were similar houses for whites, it was the first institution of its kind for coloured children, and the DRC would often use it as proof of their work amongst the coloured community. *Uitkomst* took in children between the ages of four and ten with a three-tiered purpose; to save them spiritually and physically, to mould them within a Christian tradition through regular Sunday school lessons, DRC church attendance and through the Berlin mission day school. Finally, once deemed ready, the child, no older than 16, would then be placed into Christian households in the hope of them becoming proactive members within the coloured DRC. From 1917 Mrs. Martha Murray, who previously served as a missionary in Nyassaland (Malawi), managed the house with great success. Gerdener was both the founder of the house and its treasurer. He would also combine his dual positions of CSV chairman and Muslim missionary with the CSV being *Uitkomst*'s first, and for a long time only, consistent contributor, donating £75 a year. Gerdener served as missionary here until 1919, when he was replaced by A.J. Liebenberg. As the fruit of his efforts he baptized eight Muslim converts during his tenure.¹⁵⁴ Gerdener laid the foundation for a ministry which would grow in stature within the DRC and by 1922 the Muslim mission would become the responsibility of the DRC General Mission Commission, under A.C. Murray.¹⁵⁵

1917 marked a significant change in Gerdener's life as he accepted a call as second minister in the Stellenbosch DRC congregation. He now embarked on a phase in his life which

¹⁵⁰"Vereistes wat 'n werker moe besit om onder Mohammedane te arbei", [DRC Archives in SA, KS 377/2].

¹⁵¹Dagbestuur minutes of the Wellington Theological School. [DRC Archives in SA, VGK – Sin 463].

¹⁵²Lukas C.S. Haasbroek, "Die sending onder die Mohammedane in Kaapstad en omgewing". (Stellenbosch: Mth Thesis, 1955), 96.

¹⁵³"Home for the destitute coloured children" written by Gerdener as treasurer, 1920. [DRC Archives in SA, KS377/1].

¹⁵⁴Haasbroek, "Die sending onder die Mohammedane in Kaapstad en omgewing", 105.

¹⁵⁵"Uitkomst Tehuis voor Kleurling-kinderen in het Kaapse Schiereiland" [DRC Archives in SA, KS377/1].

was confession, rather than world, focused. However, the unique and dynamic path which Gerdener had walked to this point, would continue to influence and guide his approach. It is interesting here to note already the complexity in Gerdener's character. He was not easily categorized and was marked by a combination of both open-mindedness and fixed principles. This will become clearer as we progress through his work in the Stellenbosch and Wakkerstroom congregations, and ultimately in the FMC.

Chapter II: *The struggle for identity and confession (1918-1932)*

Beginning with his acceptance of a ministerial role in the Stellenbosch DRC, Gerdener's life would proceed through several phases. Most notably he would endure a distinct shift in doctrinal emphasis, away from the interdenominational CSV toward one more confined and confessionally specific as he approached the DRC pulpit at the age of 36. This chapter will also track Gerdener's growing influence in the concurrently developing Afrikaner identity, not only in ecclesiastical terms but also on secular and cultural terrains. During this time, Gerdener would strengthen his stance as an apologist for the Reformed faith, an avid historian, a champion for the Afrikaner culture and a devout spiritual leader.

The Reformed Apologist

In August of 1916 the active assistant minister of the Stellenbosch DRC congregation, Dr. S.B. Muller, accepted a call to the town of Philippolis in the Free State. Before departing, Muller advised the Stellenbosch church council that it was imperative that they swiftly find the right person to continue the work which he had initiated, and to provide assistance to then minister D.S. Botha.¹⁵⁶ Gerdener, who was still active within the DRC Muslim mission, was the first name to be proposed. After Gerdener's refusal of the calling, Ds. Botha and his council went through a probing period of nine months in search of an assistant minister. During this time a second call was extended to Gerdener, however, with the same response of dismissal. At a church council meeting in May 1917, the decision was taken to open a permanent position for a second minister in the congregation, as opposed to a temporary assistant position.¹⁵⁷ A.F. Louw and H.J. Pienaar were respectively unable to accept the proposition, which led to a letter of occupation being issued to the next candidate within the pool of thirteen. This time around, with a job description focused primarily on the youth, Gerdener accepted the call to work alongside Botha as second minister. Gerdener was promptly ordained into the congregation on the 2nd of December 1917, and by the following day he was already sitting as secretary in his first church council meeting.¹⁵⁸

With this Gerdener stepped into the role of a Reformed minister and already within his first year behind the pulpit he was faced with a doctrinal controversy which drew him into a

¹⁵⁶Stellenbosch DRC Church Council Minutes, August 1916 [DRC Church Archives in SA, GEM-K 2091].

¹⁵⁷Ibid., May 1917.

¹⁵⁸Stellenbosch DRC Church Council Minutes, December 1917 [DRC Archives in SA, GEM-K 2092].

task of apologetic nature. This controversy was sparked when, in early 1918, a Mr. P.J. de Jager condemned the church's teaching as heretical and resigned as member of the congregation.¹⁵⁹ De Jager distributed a pamphlet in Dutch, *De Bijbel versus de Kerk*, in which he justified his accusations towards the DRC. Briefly, his disagreements with the church rested on a few select points namely that humans were by nature not immortal, that the doctrine of eternal punishment was unbiblical, the denial of the Trinity and the denial of Jesus' divinity.¹⁶⁰ Through a counter pamphlet titled *De Bijbel en de Kerk* Gerdener provided a rebuttal to each of de Jager's arguments using biblical texts to defend the Reformed doctrine. Gerdener reaffirmed the authority of the DRC faith confessions and accused de Jager of selective and subjective interpretation. He went further to dismiss de Jager as follows: "Reformed the writer is not, as he denies, amongst others infant baptism; Calvinist he is neither, because he denies pre-election, which Calvin named the 'core ecclesiae'; he is no longer even Christian, as he denies the divinity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity".¹⁶¹ *De Bijbel en de Kerk* reflects Gerdener's immaculate grasp of and adherence to the Reformed tradition. However it also brings to light certain interesting aspects of his personal theology. When explaining the immorality of the human soul, Gerdener seems to understand the person dualistically. Differently put, the spiritual and physical dimensions of the person are depicted as two separate entities, with the spiritual dimension being eternal and the physical body temporal. Gerdener drew this argument back to the creation story, where God placed the external and eternal soul within the human being. This Platonic understanding also seems to have infiltrated Gerdener's missiological rationale; in that the saving of souls and the nursing of social ills were, to his mind, two distinct duties of mission work with the former taking stern priority. Further, Gerdener emphasized that the Bible was to be read in its entirety, and it is in this manner that he defended and emphasized the doctrine of eternal punishment for sinners, the Trinity and the perseverance of sanctification by grace.¹⁶²

Gerdener's short ministry in Stellenbosch was marked by his dealings with alternative religious movements, which were strikingly different from traditional Christianity. Coinciding with the Gerdener and de Jager dialogue was J.I. Marais' dismissal of the *Christian Science* belief system as the most recent distraction sent from Satan: "one based on egoism and selfishness" and compared it to the teachings found in *Yoga*, which originated in India.¹⁶³ *Christian Science* held that the material world was merely an illusion and that the purpose of

¹⁵⁹Ibid., January 1918.

¹⁶⁰G.B.A. Gerdener, *De Bijbel en de Kerk: naar aanleiding van "De Bijbel versus de Kerk"*. (Stellenbosch: CSV Boekhandel, 1918), 6.

¹⁶¹Ibid., 19.

¹⁶²Ibid., 9-15.

¹⁶³Gereformeerde Maandblad. February 1918, 12. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 271].

human existence was to live in harmony with the Universal Spirit, thus denying one's own personality. An American, Mary Baker Eddy, founded *Christian Science* primarily through her book, *Science and Health, with a Key to Scripture*, which claimed to hold the spiritual secret to life. In 1879 *The Church of Christ, Scientist* was established and two years later her Metaphysical College was instituted in Boston. Eddy took measures to ensure the infallibility of her doctrine amongst her followers by claiming that Christ's Second Coming had taken place through the divine inspiration of her book and furthermore banned preaching in her churches.¹⁶⁴ *Christian Science* was a modern version of an ancient belief system known as Gnosticism. It encapsulated a negative attitude towards the physical world and taught that salvation could only be attained through acquiring a 'secret' or hidden truth which would allow the believer to transcend from the physical and into the spiritual world.¹⁶⁵ Gerdener would encounter a strain of this spirituality during his work in his second parish in the Transvaal, six years later.

Gerdener believed that faithful biblical witness and the exposition of the heretical teachings of modern-day sects to be the responsibility of Christians. To this end he urged the South African Bible Society to publish more material which could enlighten the public on these divisive doctrines.¹⁶⁶ Gerdener then took this responsibility upon himself and soon became somewhat of a sectarian expert. While in Stellenbosch, he penned several interesting articles, pamphlets and chapters on sects. His interest in this field eventually found its culmination in the topic of his doctoral dissertation. The first sect which captured Gerdener's attention, and of which de Jager was an adherent, was known as *Russellism*. In 1920 *Het Russellisme* was distributed by the South African Bible Society; a pamphlet in which this movement, started by the American Charles T. Russell in 1885, was mapped out by Gerdener. Russellism was a millennialist belief system in which Russell taught that, from the year 1914, Jesus would usher in his 1000-year reign of peace leading up to the final judgement.¹⁶⁷ Ironically, 1914 would not usher in peace, but rather the bloodiest war the world had ever seen. This theory gave the movement its surrogate definition, *Millennial Dawnism*, and its teachings were spread through vast publications; specifically through its founders' textbook *Studies in the Scriptures*, which often took predominance over the Bible. Gerdener described *Russellism* as an old heresy dressed in new clothes. This became blatantly apparent when the nature of Christ was discussed. Following the example of the fifth century church debate between Nestorius and Cyril regarding the divinity of Christ, with Nestorius arguing that Christ was merely a

¹⁶⁴Justo L. González, *The story of Christianity: The reformation to the present day*. (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), 346.

¹⁶⁵Justo L. González, *Church history: an essential guide*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 28.

¹⁶⁶Gereformeerde Maandblad. May 1920. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 271].

¹⁶⁷G.B.A. Gerdener, *Het Russellisme: Een hedendaagse karikatuur van het Christendom*. (Stellenbosch: Z.A.B.V., 1920),

uniquely inspired human and Cyril taking up the Alexandrian position of God becoming flesh in Jesus¹⁶⁸, Gerdener entered into dialogue with Russell. Using texts such as Acts 20:28, Romans 3:25 and Matthew 1:23, Gerdener defended the Godly nature of Jesus and the belief that the salvation and reconciliation of humanity rested solely on the sufficiency of Jesus' sacrifice. He urged young people to not fall for the illusive charm of these erroneous movements, which were often rooted in their disregard of punishment for sin, but to remain steadfast in the Calvinist tradition which "has braved centuries of storms and strife, and has formed people with steel in their blood".¹⁶⁹

After two years of wrestling with these unorthodox religious branches, Gerdener reported on his findings in an interesting and integrated two-part article on sects, which was published in a local ecclesiastical newspaper. Gerdener explained how the origins of the various non-Reformed groups of the day could be boiled down to two main movements: *De Nieuwe Apostolische Kerk* and *De Apostolische Geloofzending*. The former movement had its roots in Edward Irving, a Scottish minister from London, and was characterized by the idea of present-day living apostles being sent by God to lead the church back to its original New Testament form. It did not find much traction in South Africa and so Gerdener refuted it by briefly reiterating the three marks of apostleship as taught by the Reformed doctrine.¹⁷⁰ The latter was the name given to a fairly new charismatic movement which was beginning to gain notable momentum across the world and one which is still immensely popular today, broadly known as Pentecostalism. During the late 1800s the United States of America faced a challenge within its urban areas, where recent immigrants were living in grossly overcrowded conditions and lacked contact with Protestant Christianity. Many in the Methodist denomination responded to this crisis with a return to the basic elements of John Wesley's teaching. Globally, this shift within a faction of Methodism triggered relief operations such as the Salvation Army, a movement which started in England and soon spilled over to the United States. The emphasis on Wesley's teachings, especially regarding sanctification and the earnest care for the poor, also led to new ecclesiastical movements in the United States. These came to be known as *Holiness Churches*, whose worship was marked with the outpouring of spiritual gifts such as miraculous healing and speaking in tongues. This Pentecostal movement gained great vigour in 1906 through the so-called Azusa Street Mission of Los Angeles, led by the Methodist pastor William J. Seymour. He was a former slave and was later banned from the pulpit for his preaching on the gift of tongues. The movement spread like wildfire out of the Azusa Street

¹⁶⁸Robert Louis Wilken, *The first thousand years: A global history of Christianity*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 195-204.

¹⁶⁹Gerdener, *Het Russellisme*, 19.

¹⁷⁰Gereformeerde Maandblad. November 1920, 258. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 271].

revival and soon the influence of Pentecostal denominations widened in scope; from the U.S.A. urban crisis to that of global impact.¹⁷¹ This movement reached South Africa around 1908 and although Gerdener spoke approvingly of Pentecostalism's fervour for mission work and desire to evangelize, he criticized it for its proselytizing desire to convert Christian people from their present Christian churches.¹⁷²

Gerdener saw this as a threat to the unity of the Christian church. This fear predominantly contributed to his depiction of Pentecostalism as a heretical cult. This would also pit Gerdener's traditionalism against a modern estrangement of the Reformed doctrine. Once again, through a Reformed interpretation of biblical text, Gerdener attacked the core characteristics of Pentecostalism: speaking in tongues, baptism through immersion, miraculous healing and the idea that being baptised by the Holy Spirit was a separate event to one's acceptance of faith. In his argument, Gerdener distinguished between normal gifts and extraordinary gifts of the Spirit. The former were indispensable and given to all believers, whereas extraordinary gifts were temporary and selectively issued by the Holy Spirit. He explained this further by arguing that languages would come to an end, whereas love, faith and hope were eternal.¹⁷³ In his defence of infant baptism, Gerdener argued from within his typical missiological framework and depicted the first century Apostolic church as a missional one. To this he could ascribe the high number of adult baptisms in the Bible, as all the new converts were people coming out of heathenism, while infant baptism only came about once a Christian mother church was established. Further, Gerdener understood the sacrament of baptism as an inauguration into the covenant of grace and that "through it no-one, who is recognized by Christ as an heir to the Kingdom, may be excluded".¹⁷⁴

The need to defend the Reformed doctrine against these movements sharpened Gerdener's own grasp of his faith tradition. The examination of these religious heresies also brought him into closer contact with the theologically technical aspect of his field, through interaction with influential theologians such as J.I. Marais and Johannes du Plessis.¹⁷⁵ This would later serve Gerdener well when tasked with formulating the DRC's catechism book, *Handboek by die Katkisasie*, in which he presented the elements of the Reformed tradition.

¹⁷¹González, *The story of Christianity: The reformation to the present day*, 338-340.

¹⁷²Gereformeerde Maandblad. November 1920, 258. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 271].

¹⁷³Gereformeerde Maandblad. December 1920, 266. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 271].

¹⁷⁴Ibid., 270.

¹⁷⁵Stellenbosch DRC Church Council Minutes, 14 January 1918 [DRC Church Archives in SA, GEM-K 2092].

The historian and linguist

The newspaper, *Die Gereformeerde Maandblad* (GM), was started by J.I. Marais in 1892 as a pet project with the primary intention of providing young DRC ministers with council and guidance regarding questions of the day. In July 1918 Gerdener picked up the editor's pen from Marais and C.F.J. Muller with palpable anxiety. Confronting the challenges faced by the church in a morally bankrupt society and a world in turmoil, he launched his editorship of the Dutch paper with the following words: "this is the night of dark things!"¹⁷⁶ This angst was, however, a motivating rather than a halting force and a clear dedication to elevate the intellectual maturity of the Afrikaner people was unmistakable. To this end Gerdener held the paper to a high and scientific standard, similar to the approach he would take 21 years later with *Op Die Horison*. As a result, Gerdener channelled all feelings of apprehension into a hopeful energy and motivated the reader by stating that: "we are facing the renaissance of our volk... let us aim high, work hard and pray a lot."¹⁷⁷

The language policy of the newspaper was immediately set out by Gerdener within the first edition. The editorial board took a neutral stance regarding the language used by contributors, allowing both Dutch and Afrikaans. However, Afrikaans contributors were required to use the grammatical rule book known as the *Afrikaanse Woordlijs en Spelreels*.¹⁷⁸ This reflected the complex situation Afrikaners found themselves in. A struggle of language which was significantly initiated by the DRC religious revival of the 1860s and the resulting urgency to bring the Christian message to the very poor. This movement was subsequently taken up and popularized by the neo-Calvinist minister S.J. du Toit, a South African disciple of Abraham Kuyper, from 1875. This later became known as the first Afrikaans language movement. The debate centred around the status-conscious colonial Afrikaners who clung to the so-called sophisticated Dutch language as the only chance of gaining respect within an English dominated society, and the vast majority of Afrikaners, ex-slaves and servants who spoke a simplified version of Dutch. Du Toit argued that the mother tongue of a nation was the only valid vehicle able to convey its character, and through the *Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners*, which he co-founded, closely related language and his flavour of nationalism. In his plea for Afrikaans, Du Toit falsely classified it as a white man's language stolen from them by the coloured population. Further, he urged that Afrikaner culture be developed within their

¹⁷⁶Gereformeerde Maandblad. July 1918, 81. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 271].

¹⁷⁷ Gereformeerde Maandblad. January 1919, 1. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 272].

¹⁷⁸Gereformeerde Maandblad. July 1918, 82. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 271].

lingua franca and that Afrikaners devote themselves towards the development of Afrikaans as their national language.¹⁷⁹

By 1905 the language issue was in a state of limbo; neither entirely Dutch nor entirely Afrikaans. This prodded the famous Cape political leader Jan 'Onze' Hofmeyr to write a notorious speech entitled, *Is't ons Erenst*, in which he addressed the poor Dutch instruction which Cape children were receiving. Gustav Preller responded by arguing that Afrikaans should replace Dutch as it had become engrained within the Afrikaner people and saw this as their only chance of survival against the dominance of English.¹⁸⁰ This struggle between Dutch and Afrikaans was especially contested within the Afrikaner's cultural home, the DRC. Gerdener and Botha's Stellenbosch congregation, one with deep roots in the old Dutch tradition, stood firmly in the way of Afrikaans' path to the pulpit. In preparation for a DRC presbytery meeting, which would table the motion of elevating Afrikaans to the pulpit, Gerdener asked the opinion of his church council. The result was that eleven out of the twelve members voted for Afrikaans to be opposed at that time, with the remaining member voting for Afrikaans not only be opposed at that time, but indefinitely.¹⁸¹

Eventually the opposite sides found middle ground, as the pro-Dutch faction realized they were battling a lost cause and the pro-Afrikaans group faced the reality that, if Afrikaans were to replace Dutch as the language of the civilized and cultured thinker, it would need to be standardised through structured rules and spelling.¹⁸² Consequently, the *Zuid-Afrikaanse Akademie voor Taal, Letteren en Kunst*, which recognized both Dutch and Afrikaans, was established in 1909 and published the first Afrikaans spelling rules in 1915 through the book mentioned above.¹⁸³ The banner for Afrikaans was now being taken up by a new generation of Afrikaners such as D.F. Malan, who presented the Afrikaner language as a salvific solution to the degenerate state of many Afrikaner people. He emphasized this position by delivering the language issue as a source of cultural pride and national self-respect.¹⁸⁴ Afrikaans gained momentum and in the November edition of the GM Gerdener reported that the 1919 DRC Synod had officially recognized Afrikaans as an official language of the church, alongside Dutch.¹⁸⁵ This Synod decision had a notable effect on the mind-set of Gerdener's church council. In 1920, the same council which rejected Afrikaans as a viable pulpit language, agreed

¹⁷⁹Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 218.

¹⁸⁰Hermann Giliomee, *Afrikaner nationalism, 1875-1899*, 284.

¹⁸¹Stellenbosch DRC Church Council Minutes, 23 September 1918. [DRC Archives in SA, GEM-K 2092].

¹⁸²Gereformeerde Maandblad. March 1918, 35. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 271].

¹⁸³Giliomee, *Afrikaner nationalism, 1875-1899*, 285.

¹⁸⁴Koorts, *DF Malan and the rise of Afrikaner Nationalism*, 47.

¹⁸⁵Gereformeerde Maandblad. November 1919, 271. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 271].

to a request from the Stellenbosch University student council asking for Sunday morning services in the C.J.V. Hall to be conducted in Afrikaans.¹⁸⁶

The greatest necessity for the continued development of Afrikaans was the need to expand its literature. From the start of this second language movement J.D. du Toit, son of S.J. du Toit and better known by his alias Totius, and C.J. Langenhoven, began writing poetry and books in Afrikaans. Together with Afrikaans periodicals, such as *Die Huisgenoot* and *Die Boerevrou*, these publications began to create within the people a sense of self-awareness and Afrikaans soon became part of the Afrikaner identity.¹⁸⁷ This camp consisting of a new generation of Afrikaners who actively fought for language rights included Gerdener, and in 1919 he contributed to the need for literature by writing a biography on the Voortrekker leader Sarel Cilliers. This was one of the first biographies to be written in Afrikaans and simultaneously carried significant historical, cultural and linguistic value.¹⁸⁸ Concurrently, with this publication Gerdener sought to contribute towards another key ingredient needed for national character building and one which he believed was desperately lacking. In one of his later historical publications he expressed this historiographical need through a quote by Paul Kruger: “he who wants to create for himself a future, may not lose sight of the past”.¹⁸⁹ Gerdener lamented the fact that the Afrikaner people’s heart was cold towards history and that he lived in a country where history was often made, but also too easily forgotten. To this end he saw the potential which history, and specifically church history, held for the elevation of the Afrikaner. “We require a book in which the life in and through the church will be seen and felt in the background of our volk’s life; where the establishment and growth, the struggle and triumph, the trial and error of our ecclesial existence will be described”.¹⁹⁰ A hunger for Afrikaner history was clear. By 1920 Gustav Preller’s Afrikaans biography of Piet Retief had already undergone ten reprints since its publication in 1905, shortly after the second language movement commenced.¹⁹¹

Gerdener attached significant value to historical writings of a biographical nature, for the purpose of building national consciousness. His appreciation for this style of historiography lay in its ability to connect the reader emotionally to the past. This, to his mind, contributed in making a unique heritage part of a nation’s soul while building national pride through a sentimental connection. Based on this principle, Gerdener believed the Great Trek to be the

¹⁸⁶Stellenbosch DRC Church Council Minutes, 7 June 1920. [DRC Archives in SA, GEM-K 2092].

¹⁸⁷Giliomee, *Afrikaner nationalism, 1875-1899*, 286.

¹⁸⁸Gereformeerde Maandblad. August 1919, 212. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 271].

¹⁸⁹G.B.A. Gerdener, *Ons kerk in die Transgariep: geskiedenis van die Ned. Geref. Kerke in Natal, Vrystaat en Transvaal*. (Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers, 1923).

¹⁹⁰Gereformeerde Maandblad. August 1918, 100. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 271].

¹⁹¹Gustav S. Preller, *Piet Retief: lewensgeskiedenis van die grote voortrekker*. (Kaapstad: De Nasionale Pers, 1920), V.

most heroic period of the Afrikaner's story, akin to the significance which Old Testament history held for the Jewish people. Life histories of Voortrekker leaders were therefore of great importance to Gerdener in the struggle for awakening Afrikaner ancestral awareness, as they represented a pivotal point in the narrative of the Afrikaners. Gerdener would build on Preller's biographies of Piet Retief and Louis Trichardt with his work on Sarel Cilliers; a work praised by J.I. Marais and others as having added weight to the cause and struggle for Afrikaans.¹⁹² In the biography Gerdener depicted Cilliers as the prophet of the Great Trek and the father of the most important day for Afrikaner cultural remembrance, the memorial of Blood River known as *Dingaansdag*.¹⁹³ He detailed the battle between the Boers and the Zulus of 16 December 1838 in a poetically symbolic fashion. "Bloodriver was not merely noteworthy, because 407 men defeated a mass of 12,000 in their own territory, but because the superiority of right over might was guaranteed in that victory... there was not only a clash between white and black, between Afrikaner and Zulu, but between freedom and oppression, between the voice of the volk and the grossest tyranny which has ever existed".¹⁹⁴ It was on this premise that Gerdener attested to the great significance of the Voortrekker's promise made to God on 7 December, in which they dedicated themselves to God and pledged to always commemorate this day of triumph, given to them by God.¹⁹⁵

Gerdener, formed by the German Romantic tradition, would also dedicate himself to this building of Afrikaner historical awareness through several other means, and would wrap it within a missiological paradigm. From 1917 he authored several biographical pieces in the GM on significant missionaries such as Nicolaas van Zinzendorf, Johann Gottlieb Leipoldt, Daniel Lindley, Barnabas Shaw, Francois Coillard, J.T. van der Kemp and Robert Moffat.¹⁹⁶ He energetically rallied against histories which he believed falsely portrayed the Afrikaners, and specifically the Voortrekkers, as enemies of mission. Even though the cause of the Great Trek was rooted within a missionary dilemma for the Boers brought about by the abolishment of slavery, Gerdener was adamant in rewriting this part of Afrikaner history with an inflated sense of glory.¹⁹⁷ "The attitude of the Voortrekkers towards the mission needs our attention because they were the pioneers for civilization and Christianity across the Great river, and because they set the tone for the future with regard to how this matter is viewed and handled."¹⁹⁸ He went on to root his missional history of Afrikaners within the soil of a divine calling. He depicted

¹⁹²Gereformeerde Maandblad. March 1919, 79. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 271].

¹⁹³G.B.A. Gerdener, *Sarel Cilliers: die vader van Dingaansdag: lewenskets van die grote voortrekker*. (Kaapstad: Griffiths, 1919), 9-13.

¹⁹⁴Gerdener, *Sarel Cilliers*, 72.

¹⁹⁵Ibid., 67-68.

¹⁹⁶Gereformeerde Maandblad. 1917-1919. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 271].

¹⁹⁷Retief Muller, "War, Exilic Pilgrimage and Mission: South Africa's Dutch Reformed Church in the Early Twentieth Century." In: *Studies in World Christianity* 24, no. 1 (2018): 66-81.

¹⁹⁸Wellington Mission Institute yearbook 1936, 2. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydskrifte Sending-Instituut Wellington].

Afrikaners as a chosen people who were responsible for carrying the flame of Christianity into the dark African continent. Referring to the relationship of mission and the Afrikaners he claimed that it was “unlikely that there has ever been a white race in history that has been placed in a position as the Afrikaners have”.¹⁹⁹ He justified this extreme declaration by sketching the event of van Riebeeck and the colonists as the arrival of a superior civilization and as the saviours of a primitive people. Gerdener maintained that through this event, the Reformed Christian faith began to be propagated amongst the natives; a responsibility which would then be continued by the Afrikaner nation.²⁰⁰ He also presented the case of a pro-mission Afrikaner heritage through several celebratory pamphlets such as *‘n Eeu van Genade: 1838-1938, Ons Protestantse erfenis, Two Centuries of Grace, The story of Christian mission in South Africa*, as well as through larger publications and biographies. This idea of being divinely singled out would become typical within Afrikaner nationalism and would serve as a fundamental justification for the ideals of exclusivity and separateness.

As a result of his literary efforts, Gerdener became known within the DRC primarily as a mission historian and he would often embark on research and historical projects throughout his life.²⁰¹ Gerdener’s theory of history was shaped to a remarkable degree by his belief that Afrikaner identity had to be historically rooted. Further, his history arose out of an organic paradigm. A dynamic construct which was contextually influenced by material, social, psychological and theological factors. This meant that his historical style hinged on a theory of cause and effect, which could by no means be separated from the superiority of God. Therefore, his missiology, theology and history were all inter-linked and formed the platform for Gerdener’s worldview.

Another literary service which Gerdener provided to this early identity forming period of the Afrikaner nation, was his involvement in the first committee for the translation of the Dutch State Bible into Afrikaans; a process which took over 16 years to complete. It was a call already sounded in the 1870s by a teacher in Paarl, Arnoldus Pannevis, who was concerned with the coloured children’s inability to read the Dutch Bible. This call was then assimilated into the nationalist sentiments of S.J. du Toit during the first language movement.²⁰² In January 1917, N.J. van der Merwe, secretary of the Bible translation commission of the Free-State Synod, informed the newspaper *De Burger* that the process of translating the Dutch State Bible into Afrikaans had begun. He clarified that the translation would not be done from the original

¹⁹⁹G.B.A. Gerdener, *Die Afrikaner en die Sending*, (Kaapstad: NG Kerk uitgewers, 1959), 3.

²⁰⁰G.B.A. Gerdener, *The story of Christian mission in South Africa*. (Johannesburg: Linden Christian Church, 1950), 6.

²⁰¹Kerkbode, 14 December 1966, 875. [DRC Archives in SA].

²⁰²Jeff Opland, “The drumbeat of the Cross: Christianity and literature.” In: *Christianity in South Africa: a political, social and cultural history*, ed. Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport. (Cape Town: David Philip, 1997), 301.

languages, as that need had not yet arisen amongst the Afrikaner people and that such a translation would be seen as a ‘different Bible’, but rather that this new translation would simply be a re-working of the Dutch version into Afrikaans. This first translation commission consisted of three Old Testament and three New Testament translators, with Gerdener as a member of the latter trio.²⁰³ Prof. B.B. Keet, also one of the translators, expressed in Lutheran terms the responsibility of translation as placing the Bible back into the hands of the people, due to the fact that so few Afrikaners used or understood Dutch. Keet indirectly summarized the intricate relationship which religion and language would have in the development of Afrikaner identity in no uncertain manner: “to bring the Bible in the living and powerful Afrikaans language which has become one with our volk”.²⁰⁴ The Bible was completed in 1933 under the leadership of J.D. Kestell with influential roles played by other Afrikaners such as Totius.²⁰⁵ With the much anticipated release of this translation, Gerdener expressed the hope that it would have a stabilizing effect on the still developing Afrikaans language and would find a place in the heart and home of the volk. Gerdener’s love for and dedication to the Afrikaans language was made clear through his enthusiastic words regarding the new Bible: “the language thereof is Afrikaans, full bred Afrikaans... our own language, which is capable of sufficiently interpreting eternal thoughts in a dignified manner, and just as well as other languages can”.²⁰⁶ The Afrikaans Bible arrived eight years after Afrikaans replaced Dutch as an official language in South Africa in 1925, and was widely acclaimed as one of the greatest feats in the religion and culture of the Afrikaner people.²⁰⁷

The fruits of another tactical victory for Afrikaner Nationalism would become tangible in 1918, when the Stellenbosch University was established. The battle for a single teaching university started in 1913 when the Smuts-Botha cabinet, with F.S. Malan as Minister of Education, agreed with Cecil John Rhodes’ idea of establishing a tertiary institute at Groote Schuur, Cape Town. Through this motion the academic centrum of Stellenbosch, which represented and sheltered Afrikaner traditions and ideals, came under threat as the proposal entailed an exclusively English university with imperial ends in sight. A committee which included D.F. Malan and J.I. Marais was selected to pressurize F.S. Malan and the rest of the cabinet to terminate their plans for Groote Schuur. Largely due to this deputation, coupled with the rise of greater political controversy centred on Hertzog and Louis Botha, the cabinet

²⁰³N.J. van der Merwe, “De Bijbel Vertaling.” *De Burger*, 12 January 1917. [DRC Archives in SA, PPV 73].

²⁰⁴Gereformeerde Maandblad. August 1918, 105. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 271].

²⁰⁵George Hofmeyr, *NG Kerk 350: eenhonderd bakens in die geskiedenis van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk 1652-2002*. (Wellington: Lux Verbi.BM, 2002), 175.

²⁰⁶G.B.A. Gerdener, “Die vrug van sestien jaar: onskatbare dienste van die Bybelvertalers.” *Die Burger*, 1933. [DRC Archives in SA, PPV 73].

²⁰⁷Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 428-429.

withdrew its support for a single teaching university.²⁰⁸ Regarding the status of Stellenbosch's higher education institute, however, the government insisted that, before the Victoria College could be seen as a university, it would need to raise £100 000. This requirement would be met when J.H. Marais, who made his fortune in the diamond industry of Kimberly before moving to Stellenbosch and founding the National Press, left the stated amount to the college shortly before his death in 1915, with the sole condition that Dutch or Afrikaans never be subordinate to English.²⁰⁹ The doors of Stellenbosch University opened for the first time on the 2nd of April 1918, and with this came administrative complications for Gerdener and his congregation. An influx of students into a small town with limited church space led to the need for expansion. The conundrum of physical space led to an arduous wrestling match for the council which lasted for 12 years.²¹⁰ The discussions were often marked by heated debate, with several council and combined meetings revolving around either enlarging the existing building or the construction of a new one; a suggestion supported by Rev. Botha.²¹¹

The fact that this issue mostly impacted a younger demographic, meant it fell into the scope of Gerdener's responsibilities and he worked constructively around the problem of a lack of space. He was proactive on the investigative commissions regarding the lack of space²¹², he sought alternatives for the gathering of the Junior Sunday School classes²¹³, and as secretary he had the responsibility of corresponding with several architects.²¹⁴ He would also need to deal with the friction caused by student frustration. In 1919, with Gerdener also serving as chairman of the church council, an article appeared in the university quarterly shaming the church by describing the situation as: "a disgraceful shame for Stellenbosch that so many young men have to stay home or walk around during church times on Sunday, for the simple reason that there is no space in the church or hall".²¹⁵ Gerdener met with Timo Kriel, the student who authored the article and requested that he retract his allegation, a request he agreed to. Finally, a decision was made, in November 1920, just before Gerdener was to leave, that a new building would be built on the Concordia property in Ryneveld Street.²¹⁶ The existing hostel on the property was demolished and Botha laid the first stone for the new building on 19 March 1927.²¹⁷

²⁰⁸D.F. Malan, *Afrikaner volkseenheid en my ervarings op die pad daarheen*. (Kaapstad: Nasionale BoekhandelBeperk, 1959), 15.

²⁰⁹Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners*, 364.

²¹⁰A.M. Hugo and J. van der Bijl, *Die Kerk van Stellenbosch 1686-1963*. [DRC Archives in SA, G1081 Die].

²¹¹Stellenbosch DRC Church Council Minutes, 29 November 1918. [DRC Archives in SA, GEM-K 2092].

²¹²*Ibid.*, 6 May 1918.

²¹³*Ibid.*, 12 March 1918.

²¹⁴*Ibid.*, 5 August 1918.

²¹⁵Stellenbosch DRC Church Council Minutes, 28 June 1919. [DRC Archives in SA, GEM-K 2092].

²¹⁶*Ibid.*, 12 November 1920.

²¹⁷A.M. Hugo and J. van der Bijl, *Die Kerk van Stellenbosch 1686-1963*. [DRC Archives in SA, G1081 Die].

Gerdener did not allow these distracting developments to cloud his missional agendas. On a wide scale he was a member of the General Synod's mission commission but he was also pro-active on a more practical level.²¹⁸ During his short ministry in Stellenbosch he was influential in the employing of a second mission worker for the congregation, George Terblanche, who was assigned to serve the neglected coloured population in the outer districts. After Terblanche resigned from his post, it was decided that a coloured evangelist would be sought as a replacement, which promptly led to the appointment of Laban Jeftha. He was offered half that of an average white mission worker's salary and was closely supervised by the congregation's mission church minister, B.H. Latskey. A situation demonstrative of the prevalent paternalistic culture within the DRC structures and of the wider friction in the industrial sector of the country which was beginning to rear its head.²¹⁹ Gerdener's model of coloured people working amongst and for coloured people, represented here, would continue to develop along with his racial rationale towards the South African context. He especially emphasized the increased training of indigenous ministers so as to encourage their development towards complete independence, a structure espoused by the tradition of Warneck.²²⁰

In the social sphere, Gerdener helped organize a mission conference in Stellenbosch in 1918, and his time in the congregation would afford him close proximity to his friend, congregant and mission intellectual Johannes du Plessis. This renowned missiological leader and professor was also beginning to make waves within the theological world during this time, as his modernist views began to clash with a new theological current known as neo-Calvinism, which was entering the Seminary from the Kuyperian Vrije University in Amsterdam.²²¹ Two influential proponents of this uber-conservative stream were the theological lecturers E.E. van Rooyen and D.G. Malan. As the Stellenbosch DRC and the Seminary enjoyed a long tradition of cooperation through its close proximity, theological developments in the academic institution had direct ramifications for the congregation as well. This was exemplified when a council member sought to comment on the new appointment of van Rooyen as lecturer in 1920. Gerdener was a structuralist, in that he understood all entities in relation to an overarching structure, and therefore reprimanded the member by stating that the appointment of Seminary staff members was outside of the church council's jurisdiction, even though he himself was no supporter of Neo-Calvinism.²²²

²¹⁸Van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener koersaanwyser*, 6.

²¹⁹Stellenbosch DRC Church Council Minutes, 6 December 1920. [DRC Archives in SA, GEM-K 2092].

²²⁰Federal Mission Council, planning committee meeting minutes, 7 March 1958. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV 236].

²²¹Stellenbosch DRC Church Council Minutes, 3 February 1919. [DRC Archives in SA, GEM-K 2092].

²²²Stellenbosch DRC Church Council Minutes, 8 December 1919. [DRC Archives in SA, GEM-K 2092].

As editor of the GM, Gerdener would also need to navigate his pen through a maze of destruction and despair caused by the conflict in Europe. World War I shattered the innocence of humanity and placed an uncertain black mark next to the previously assumed superiority of Christian civilization. The war revealed a dark side to humanity, side-lined the 19th Century's progressive hopes and raised several ethical questions regarding the church and theology.²²³ Gerdener was a child of 19th Century optimism and during the war, although he lamented its tragedy and understood the dramatic change it would bring, he held to this optimistic faith.²²⁴ With the signing of the German Armistice on the 11th of November 1918, the war between the Allies and the Germans was brought to an end.²²⁵ In a painful and disorientated post-war atmosphere, with the Christian church severely discredited, Gerdener called upon his readers to adapt and for the DRC to be rehabilitated by presenting the reality as an opportunity to prove to the world God's ability to reconcile and recreate.²²⁶ Drawing upon his Murray spirituality, Gerdener predictably expounded that the only means by which such a rehabilitation of church and society could be achieved was through an extensive spiritual revival.²²⁷ With a deep-seated urgency and trust in his Reformed tradition he called for a return to an old-fashioned puritanical type of religion in which both retribution and reward, heaven and hell, righteousness and grace were recognized; in a way reminiscent of the late German Pietistic movement.

At this point the socio-political story of the Afrikaner was one of a two-fold nature. On the one hand Afrikanerdom was rising out of the ashes left by the 1914 rebellion, and the war years which followed, largely through initiatives by the National Party (NP) such as the *Helpmekaar Vereniging* of 1916. With branches in all four provinces, this fundraising movement aimed to alleviate Afrikaner poverty. A movement so successful that two insurance companies, Santam and Sanlam, were established in 1918 as developments of the fund.²²⁸ On the other hand, however, Afrikaners were divided in leadership. This antagonism centred on the governance of South Africa, with one faction calling for its complete independence and the other for a self-governing dominion within the British Empire.²²⁹ At an Imperial conference in London, Jan Smuts successfully put forward his ideal regarding the relationship between the Union and the Empire. In his proposal the dominions would be autonomous nations with control over their own affairs, within an Imperial Commonwealth. For Smuts this would abide

²²³Alasdair I.C. Heron, *A century of Protestant Theology*. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980), 69.

²²⁴Gereformeerde Maandblad. November 1918, 105. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 271].

²²⁵Alan Palmer, *The penguin dictionary of modern history 1789-1945*. (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1983), 308.

²²⁶Gereformeerde Maandblad. January 1919, 2. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 272].

²²⁷Gereformeerde Maandblad. January 1920, 1. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 271].

²²⁸Hermann Giliomee, *Afrikaner nationalism, 1875-1899*, 295.

²²⁹Steyn, *Jan Smuts: unafraid of greatness*, 53.

by the principles of freedom, while still remaining within the folds of the British Empire.²³⁰ Back in South Africa however, Smuts and his ideals, which were gaining international renown, were widely despised by the Afrikaans-speaking population. Support for Hertzog, and his proclaimed policy of South Africa first, grew notably after the death of Louis Botha which rendered Smuts the new prime minister. At the 1920 general election this political battle intensified, and Smuts was forced to form a coalition with the pro-Empire Unionist Party to ensure a narrow four vote victory over the Nationalists and Labourites.²³¹ Illustrative of a typical evangelical DRC minister commenting on politics, Gerdener depicted this battle as a childish game amongst stubborn and egoistic men who spoke of unification but were unwilling to concede an inch of their position.²³²

In efforts towards reunification, conferences were held by Afrikaners of both the South African Party (SAP) and the NP, of which Smuts attended none as he believed this was purely an attempt to remove the country from the empire. The third of these conferences was held in Bloemfontein in September 1920. Gerdener pessimistically predicted that this conference would just be used by the politicians as a tool to push their own agendas. He was saddened by the thought that these political deadlocks were causing the volk to develop in opposition to, rather than alongside, one another.²³³ Gerdener's pessimism was well-founded as talks of unification broke down around the topic of republicanism, as the SAP Afrikaners believed it would cause civil war, while the nationalists argued that they had the constitutional right to agitate for independence.²³⁴ Gerdener, who found himself in support of an independent republic, spoke to the humanitarian aspect of the debate. He contended that the building up of two white sections and the emancipation of the millions of natives in South Africa weighed heavier than the technical difficulties of the proposed autonomy. A republic would support Gerdener's ideals of separate development, a perspective which was already beginning to crystallize in his mind and which he believed would "give each section its opportunity; it will bring the two-stream politics (of Hertzog), which is thus far only a theory, to the practical test along the only possible route; that of geographical separation."²³⁵ Gerdener's support for the nationalists' republic speaks to the importance he placed on individual nationalities and the preserving of their unique cultural stamp against the threat of Anglicization, in which individual cultures would be wiped out by an empire.

²³⁰Ibid., 82.

²³¹Oswald Pirow, *James Barry Munnik Hertzog*. (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1958), 81.

²³²Gereformeerde Maandblad. January 1920, 1. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 271].

²³³Gereformeerde Maandblad. August 1920, 168. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 271].

²³⁴Pirow, *James Barry Munnik Hertzog*, 82.

²³⁵Gereformeerde Maandblad. March 1919, 51. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 272].

In 1921 Smuts called another general election in which his SAP won with a much more comfortable margin due largely to the blow which the Labour Party, the political home for many communists, had received.²³⁶ To the East the Marxist, Vladimir Lenin, led his Bolshevik party in overthrowing the Russian government in October 1918. As dictator of the world's first communist state, Lenin needed to defend the Bolsheviks' control and he did so through an intimidation campaign known as the 'Red Terror'. Lenin won the Civil War in 1920, against the democrats who were bolstered by allies, which included Britain, who feared the spread of communism.²³⁷ The atrocities committed by Lenin led to the South African Labour Party losing a number of supporters, as fear of communism increased. The Russian Revolution and its communism did, however, seep into South Africa and would be influential in the rising industrial crisis and the intense struggle of the poor white working class. This reached boiling point with the workers' strike of 1922. Smuts's SAP labelled the uprising as a communistic attempt to capture South Africa as a Soviet republic and instituted martial law, leading to a bloody suppression of the protests. An event which the NP wasted no time in using for their political gain.²³⁸ Gerdener would be out of the country during most of these volatile years.

Due to complications with his health, Gerdener required an operation which took him to Halle, Germany. This forced him, with reluctance, to hand in his resignation to the Stellenbosch congregation in November 1920. He and his family departed the following month.²³⁹ Before stepping away from the GM's editor table, Gerdener once more characteristically emphasized spiritual revival as the desperately needed remedy for the unstable state of South Africa: "our poor volk, is there still hope? Probably not outside of a bold spiritual revival, marked by deep repentance and confession of sin and sincere faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."²⁴⁰ With Gerdener laying down the editor's pen the GM also ceased to exist, as no replacement editor could be found. The vacuum left by the *Maandblad* would remain unfilled until 1923, when Johannes du Plessis established his monthly paper, *Het Zoeklicht*, which would simultaneously prove controversial largely due to its modernist theological tone. *Het Zoeklicht* would also prove a significant role-player in the doctrinal battle against the conservative faction within the DRC, eventually culminating in the well-known church case against du Plessis in 1928.²⁴¹

In April 1921, after reporting that his operation was a success, Gerdener commenced with the second motive for his European endeavour, which was to complete his doctoral

²³⁶Steyn, *Jan Smuts: unafraid of greatness*, 103.

²³⁷Victoria Heyworth-Dunne, *The history book*, (London: Dorling Kindersley Ltd, 2016), 276.

²³⁸Giliomee, *Afrikaner nationalism, 1875-1899*, 297.

²³⁹Stellenbosch DRC Church Council Minutes, 6 December 1920. [DRC Archives in SA, GEM-K 2092].

²⁴⁰Gereformeerde Maandblad. January 1920, 1. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 271].

²⁴¹G.B.A. Gerdener, *Die boodskap van 'n man*, (Stellenbosch: CSV, 1943), 144.

studies.²⁴² He continued the research on sects which he had started in Stellenbosch, and received his doctorate, *summa cum laude*, from the University of Tübingen in 1922, for his dissertation titled *Die Ursachen der Sektiererei im Reformationszeitalter*.²⁴³ In this unpublished dissertation on the origins of sects during the time of the Reformation, Gerdener's organic historiography was on display. Gerdener presented sectarianism contextually and argued that it held capital within the psychological and theological histories of both the church and the wider world.²⁴⁴ Upon returning to the land of his birth, Gerdener spent some time recuperating in Tulbagh, and it was not long before he once again picked up an editorial pen, this time by temporarily standing in for P.G.J. Meiring as editor of *Die Kerkbode*.²⁴⁵

What followed was another noteworthy shift in Gerdener's life, as he accepted a call to the Wakkerstroom congregation in 1923. He now took up the new challenge as a senior minister stationed in a new and contrasting province.

A pulpit in the North

With the acceptance of his call to Wakkerstroom (in present day Mpumalanga) Gerdener accepted a new context with all the challenges which went along with it. The ecclesiastical fabric of the Transvaal was of a more complicated nature than that of the Cape. It was rife with schisms and by the 1860s there were already three active Afrikaner churches.²⁴⁶ Gerdener was well aware of this reality and by the end of his first Northern year his inner historian had already prompted him to document these developments in a book he co-authored with L.M. Kriel, *Kerkgeskiedenis vir ons volk*.²⁴⁷ In 1934 he would expand this research regarding the three non-Cape DRC churches in a more extensive work entitled, *Ons kerk in die Transgariep*.²⁴⁸ It would be of value to very briefly sketch this unique story of the Transvaal DRC and all of its ruptures, so as to understand the years leading up to Gerdener's arrival and the task which lay before him in the district.

Afrikaner emigration out of the Cape colony began with the *trekboere*, who gravitated North in the 1820s in search of better grazing lands for their livestock and were followed by the more politically charged *Voortrekkers* in the following decade. Coupled with this

²⁴²Stellenbosch DRC Church Council Minutes, 4 April 1921. [DRC Archives in SA, GEM-K 2092].

²⁴³Kerkbode, 4 January 1933

²⁴⁴Jac Muller, *Die Christelike Sektewese*. (Stellenbosch: Boekhandel T. Wever, 1989), 11.

²⁴⁵Van der Watt, *G.B.A. Gerdener koersaanwyser*, 6.

²⁴⁶J.W. Hofmeyr, J.A. Millard and C.J.J. Froneman, *History of the church in South Africa: a document and source book*. (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1991), 144.

²⁴⁷G.B.A. Gerdener and L.M. Kriel, *Kerkgeskiedenis vir ons volk*. (Kaapstad, Nasionale Pers, 1924)

²⁴⁸G.B.A. Gerdener, *Ons kerk in die Transgariep: geskiedenis van die Ned. Geref. Kerke in Natal, Vrystaat en Transvaal*. (Kaapstad, Nasionale Pers, 1934).

northward migration into unchartered terrain came a lack of church ministers.²⁴⁹ Contributing to this insufficiency was the Cape Synod's condemnation of the Great Trek as a rebellion, which forced the Voortrekkers to organize their own churches with the help of men such as the former LMS missionary Erasmus Smit and the American missionary Daniel Lindley. Eventually, however, the Cape Synod retracted its condemnation. This opened the way for the dispersed ministries of DRC churchmen like the young Andrew Murray Jr., who essentially had the whole Free-State as his congregation, to satisfy the Northerner's spiritual thirst.²⁵⁰ Upon a request from the Transvaal, the Cape Synod of 1852 took the decision to group the Transvaal, Free-State and Natal churches into a united and separate presbytery, known as the Transgariep presbytery, and in this manner affiliated it more closely to the Cape DRC.²⁵¹

A Dutch minister, Dirk van der Hoff, arrived in Potchefstroom the following year with the agenda of organising a new Dutch church; an agenda which had disastrous consequences for the intended uniformity of the new presbytery. Contributing to this was the political manoeuvring of the future Transvaal president, M.W. Pretorius, who made use of van der Hoff and his schismatic intentions to serve his own ends, which were seated in an anti-Cape mentality. To this end, at a general meeting in 1853 it was decided to break away from the Cape to form a separate Transvaal church, and van der Hoff was ordained as the first Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk (NHK) minister in South Africa. This institution had nothing to say regarding mission in its church law.²⁵² To a large extent the schism of the NHK spoke of the Transvaal's hostility towards the British-dominated Cape, fear of racial equalization and distrust of the Cape DRC.²⁵³ In 1860 the NHK became the official state church of the Zuid Afrikaanse Republiek (ZAR) with a no-racial *gelykstelling* clause in its constitution.²⁵⁴ As with all schisms, there were still those who held to the original Dutch church through the newly formed channel of the Transgariep presbytery. A link which was kept alive exclusively by the congregations of Lydenburg and Utrecht, with Wakkerstroom being a member of the latter.

Another ecclesiastical split within the ZAR came in 1859 when another Dutch immigrant, Dirk Postma, established the Gereformeerde Kerk (GK) in Rustenburg, also known as the *Dopper* church. The movement which led to the establishment of the GK began in the Netherlands during the early 19th Century, when the conservative faction broke away from the liberals following the revolutions in Europe.²⁵⁵ In South Africa, this orthodox stream took root

²⁴⁹G.B.A. Gerdener, *Deur 'n eeu gelei: Gedenkskrif by die eeufes van die gemeente Smithfield, O.V.S.* (Smithfield: NG gemeente, 1948), 1.

²⁵⁰Elphick, *The equality of believers*, 46.

²⁵¹Gerdener, *Kerkgeskiedenis vir ons volk*, 140.

²⁵²Gerdener, *Ons kerk in die Transgariep*, 304.

²⁵³Elphick, *The equality of believers*, 46.

²⁵⁴Hofmeyr, *History of the church in South Africa*, 118.

²⁵⁵Gerdener, *Kerkgeskiedenis vir ons volk*, 146.

in the tightly knit Afrikaner farming community which settled in the North-East districts of the Cape colony and were known as the *Doppers*. They were characterised by their exceptionally strict Calvinistic religiosity and fundamental conservatism. This conservative community wrote to the newly formed *Christelijke Afskeie Gereformeerde Kerk* in Holland regarding their differences with the Transvaal church. With the dual purpose of serving this Afrikaner community as well as to establish a possible base from which to initiate a mission endeavour to the non-Christian population, the church in Holland responded by sending Postma in 1857.²⁵⁶ The basis for the *Dopper*'s grievances against the NHK, which simultaneously served as the origin for the GK in South Africa, predominantly gravitated around the hymns sung in the church. The conservative faction in the NHK refused to sing songs from the *Evangelische Gezangen*, a hymn book imported from the Netherlands in 1814, as they believed it placed songs written by people on equal footing with the divinely inspired Psalms. The songbook, however, also represented a number of other factors which the conservatives took issue with; one being the role which the state played in the church, first in the Cape and subsequently also in the Transvaal. When van der Hoff refused to remove the songs from the NHK the dissidents, led by Postma, broke away to form the GK and labelled the NHK as not submitting to Christ's will. The later ZAR president, Paul Kruger, was a member of this *Dopper* community and also a founding member of the *Dopper* church.²⁵⁷ The GK had strong ties with neo-Calvinism, out of the Netherlands, and pitted itself against the evangelical tendencies of the Cape church.²⁵⁸

A further development, which intensified the isolation of the North from the South, came in 1862 when the High Court of Cape Town declared that the DRC Synod was to consist exclusively of representatives from congregations inside the Cape colony. This forced the DRCs in the Natal, Free-State and Transvaal into a state of independent management, which resulted in four separate Synods with the Transvaal Synod being called to order in 1866.²⁵⁹ The unification of all the Republic's DRC congregations under one management was due to the efforts of the Utrecht minister Frans Lion Cachet, who worked assiduously for the rebuilding of the Transvaal DRC. With Cachet as chairman, the Transvaal Synod was established on grounds of strict adherence to DRC unity and when the question regarding its relationship to the NHK and the GK arose, Cachet answered that it would be a friendly one.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶G.C.P. van der Vyver, *Professor Dirk Postma 1818-1890*. (Potchefstroom: Pro Rege Pers Bepers, 1959), 159.

²⁵⁷Pieter Bingle, "1859. Die Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika" in: *NG Kerk* 350, 118.

²⁵⁸Elphick, *The equality of believers*, 47.

²⁵⁹D. Crafford, *Aan God die dank: Geskiedenis van die sending van die Ned. Geref. Kerk binne die Republiek van Suid-Afrika en enkele aangrensende Buurstate*. Deel 1. (Pretoria: NG Kerkboekhandel, 1982), 122.

²⁶⁰Gerdener, *Ons kerk in die Transgariep*, 307.

The effort to reconcile the Transvaal DRC and the NHK underwent a long process which eventually came to a temporary resolve in 1885, largely spurred on by the events of the first Boer freedom war in 1881, when the two churches reunified under the name *Nederduitse Hervormde of Gereformeerde Kerk*. Although there were several hurdles which stood in the way of reunification it is important to note one which was the cause of heated contention, that of racial *gelykstelling*. One of the grievances held by the Voortrekkers when leaving the Cape was the social equalizing between white and black. The ZAR made its opposition to *gelykstelling* constitutionally clear in 1858, and because these Afrikaners understood their faith to be a mark of social superiority, the NHK preached racial exclusivity; a stance emphasized by van der Hoff.²⁶¹ Therefore, regarding reunification the NHK held as a condition that “the church will humour no social equalizing” and that “a missionary without the status of minister, will be able to preach at the permission of the church council, however will not be able to serve sacraments”.²⁶²

All these developments negatively influenced mission fervour in the North in several ways. It was now completely disconnected from the richer mission resources and heritage of the Cape, the NHK harboured such a fear of *gelykstelling* that their missional imagination was paralysed and the GK’s minister Dirk Postma, while sent from the Netherlands in the hopes of igniting mission work, came up against stern anti-native sentiments from his followers.²⁶³ Mission had little hope of gaining momentum as most Northern Afrikaners saw mission work as synonymous with *gelykstelling* and talks of church reunification would overshadow all other discussions in church meetings. In the Transvaal, however, isolated efforts by churchmen such as F.L. Cachet and DRC missionaries like Stephanus Hofmeyr and H. Gonin did break through and led to a slow increase in missionary interest. In 1881 the Synod formulated its Synodal Mission Commission and by 1890 mission consciousness had become more centralized as the Synod declared mission work to be the task of the church and the responsibility of each local congregation.²⁶⁴

The Wakkerstroom congregation was established in 1860 and was interchangeably ministered by Dirk van der Hoff and N.J. van Warmelo until its first permanent minister, D.P. Ackerman, was ordained into the congregation in 1874.²⁶⁵ Due to a Capetonian influence, Wakkerstroom became the second Transvaal congregation to have a missionary. During a visit to the town Miss. A.P. Ferguson was struck by the vast number of neglected heathens in the

²⁶¹Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 176.

²⁶²Gerdener, *Ons kerk in die Transgariep*, 333.

²⁶³Crafford, *Aan God die dank*, 137.

²⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 150.

²⁶⁵Gerdener, *Ons kerk in die Transgariep*,

district, even though a local mission commission had been active in Wakkerstroom since 1889.²⁶⁶ She promptly wrote to Andrew Murray about her concern, which eventually reached prof. N.J. Hofmeyr, head of the CJV. He was asked to find a suitable candidate for this missionary task, and the candidate selected would prove to have far reaching consequences. Pieter L. le Roux was the man chosen and tasked, sent to The Gordon Memorial Mission to be equipped with the Zulu language and, after passing his missionary exam at the Natal church, began his ministry in Wakkerstroom in 1893.²⁶⁷ Missional interest increased dramatically through le Roux's ministry, with hundreds of heathens flocking to baptism and by the end of his first term the Wakkerstroom mission congregation was already operating with notable substance. Although mission work increased, hostilities towards it were by no means eradicated. Said hostilities from the white community, for example, led to mission services in the pastorage being labelled as inappropriate and were prohibited. This inspired the building of a church on a piece of land donated by General Piet Joubert in 1893, named *Zions Kerk*.²⁶⁸

As was so common at this time, yet another schismatic teaching would infiltrate Wakkerstroom and place a stumbling block in front of this missionary momentum. Through his reading of Andrew Murray's work, P.L. le Roux had already been interested in divine healing during his studies in Wellington. This interest would be crystallized once coming into contact with the teachings of John Alexander Dowie, an American who focused his ministry on faith healing and initiated the Zionist movement through his community in Illinois. Le Roux became convinced of medicinal rejection for that of faith healing but came up against stern opposition from the white congregation's mission commission, whose Calvinism would never allow such a doctrine.²⁶⁹ After corresponding with Andrew Murray, le Roux agreed to withhold his teachings. This position changed, however, once his fifteen-year-old daughter was healed through faith, and he subsequently broke his promised silence on the doctrine. In 1903 le Roux broke away from the DRC church with two thirds of his black congregation and joined the South African branch of Dowie's *Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion*. Although the white DRC made it very difficult for him, Le Roux worked as a Zionist minister in his Wakkerstroom Zion church until 1908. Consequently, le Roux's Zionist involvement with the black community was instrumental to the origins of this movement, which later became categorized as one of the African Independent Churches, alongside Ethiopianism.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁶Crafford, *Aan God die dank*, 140.

²⁶⁷A. Dreyer, *Historisch Album van de Nederduitsche Gereformeerde Kerk in ZA*, (Kaapstad: Cape Times Beprekt, 1910), 86.

²⁶⁸*Ibid.*

²⁶⁹Crafford, *Aan God die dank*, 141.

²⁷⁰M. Nel, *PL Le Roux, Dutch Reformed Missionary, Zionist Preacher and Leader of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, and the Origin of Some of the African Independent Churches in Southern Africa*.46, no. 1 (2005), 205.

In 1908, during a stint of travel in America, le Roux's faith underwent yet another development after exposure to the remnants of the Pentecostal revival at Azusa Street. John G. Lake and Thomas Hezmalhalch convinced him of baptism in the Spirit and speaking in tongues. Le Roux then joined the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM), a movement which attracted most of the then still largely white Zionist congregations of Johannesburg. Le Roux brought these new additions to his faith with him on his return to Wakkerstroom and incorporated them into his preaching. His congregants accepted his teachings and even embraced them. However, they refused to sacrifice their Zionist identity, and as a result Pentecostalism and Zionism merged in this congregation and was subsequently rebranded as the *Zion Branch of the Apostolic Faith Mission*.²⁷¹ From 1915 to 1943 le Roux would be the president of the AFM, and just as with his ministry in Stellenbosch, this would force Gerdener to deal with an alternative teaching head-to-head through regular contact with le Roux's congregation and his AFM movement.²⁷² His background in sects would serve Gerdener well in this instance and as minister he would often need to deal with apostate congregants who went back and forth between the DRC and AFM congregation, also known as the *Apostolische Broeders*. The responsibility of deciding returning congregants' fate rested largely on Gerdener's shoulders as senior minister. A process which characteristically followed the DRC church laws strictly and involved the applicant being brought before the church council, re-confessing their faith and answering a few questions to the satisfaction of the council, before being welcomed back.²⁷³ The AFM grew significantly amongst the black and white population and Gerdener noted that, by 1924, there were already 90 branches across the Union.²⁷⁴ The state of divergent religious movements in Wakkerstroom was such that the replacement DRC missionary, R.H. Daneel, complained that his mission congregation was "surrounded by sects".²⁷⁵ Gerdener's old enemy, Russellism, also reared its head yet again when one of his congregants began dispersing literature propagating the movement in 1930. Gerdener mobilized his church council to swiftly nip this influence in the bud, but warned that it had to be done in such a manner that the congregant, a Mr. Pretorius, not become a martyr for Russellism.²⁷⁶

This set the stage for Gerdener's entrance into the Transvaal, when he replaced Christiaan Snyman in 1923 as shepherd of the Wakkerstroom parish. Coupled with the above-mentioned missionary challenges, Gerdener was also faced with a congregation which was still heavily

²⁷¹Ibid., 206.

²⁷²Crafford, *Aan God die dank*, 140.

²⁷³Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 12 October 1929.

²⁷⁴Gerdener, *Kerkgeskiedenis vir ons volk*, 171.

²⁷⁵Dreyer, *Historisch Album van de Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in ZA*, 88.

²⁷⁶Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 24 October 1930.

weighed down by financial debt.²⁷⁷ In a situation reminiscent of his father's arrival in Wupperthal 50 years prior, Gerdener diligently busied himself with the spiritual and temporal needs of his flock.

Clearly shaped by his German mission station upbringing and, further shaped by leaders such as Andrew Murray and Gustav Warneck, Gerdener embodied an authoritarian leadership style and approached the ensuing challenges accordingly. He held that the "interest of the congregation rests on the work of the minister and council members".²⁷⁸ To put it differently, the leaders of the church were to set an example for the congregation to follow and Gerdener would regularly remind and encourage his council to this end. That being said, Gerdener was also an involved minister and would often make time for interaction with his congregants in which he would heed their grievances and questions.²⁷⁹ The division between church management and the laity was further bridged through a congregational organ called *Die Skakel*, which Gerdener edited and compiled himself and through which the congregation was kept abreast of church developments.²⁸⁰ A motivation for this was that Gerdener saw informed congregants as an asset to the church and therefore also placed great value on the DRC's newspaper the *Kerkbode*. Apart from informing readers on ecclesiastical updates, the *Kerkbode* also brought a spiritual message into the homes of readers, an impact which Gerdener described as being akin to an actual second minister.²⁸¹ As a result, the Wakkerstroom laity was regularly urged to subscribe to the church magazine, and once it dedicated separate columns specifically for the Transvaal DRC the urging was intensified.²⁸²

In hindsight, Gerdener was often described by scholars and colleagues as primarily a strategist and the diligent aspect to his personality, which contributed to this definition, acted as a guide in the fundamentals of his ministry. Gerdener's ministry was of a calculated manner and it becomes most accessible when it is sub-divided and assessed through three main entities; socio-cultural, spiritual and missional. Each aspect almost perfectly deluged amongst each other and in a sense the one provided energy and impetus for the next, injecting his work with a certain vitality.

For Gerdener the first order of business was the financial need which he stared in the face. His congregation was in a debt of £3500 and he placed this rehabilitation task upon himself and his council with the hopes of inspiring the entire congregations' united effort. With

²⁷⁷Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 24 December 1924.

²⁷⁸Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 31 January 1925.

²⁷⁹Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 24 December 1924.

²⁸⁰Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 29 October 1926.

²⁸¹Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 23 December 1925.

²⁸²Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 11 September 1926.

a plan to eradicate the church's debt within two years Gerdener intended to chip away at the mountain by remodelling the church's funding scheme. Apart from the usual church bazaar events and collection efforts, Wakkerstroom's council introduced a roaming offertory in which the church deacons would send around a contributor's list allowing each household of the congregation to contribute towards alleviating the debt. This was a separate collection to the usual tithes and Gerdener presented it in optimistic biblical terms as an opportunity for each congregant to abide by the commands of St. Paul.²⁸³ By 1928 this new tactic had not yielded the intended fruit and it was decided to return to the old system of collecting. Financial want marked Gerdener's Transvaal ministry with many Afrikaner institutions and movements seeking support. Amongst others Gerdener's ministry in Wakkerstroom lent its support to several causes such as the Afrikaanse Kuns Vereniging, CSV, a children's clinic, the Langlaagte orphanage, the Worcester school for deaf and blind children and the Stofberg Gendenkskool, an institution in the Free State which trained black evangelists and teachers.²⁸⁴ This was reflective of a wider state of indigence within the Afrikaner people, a phenomenon which came to be known as the poor white problem.

The poor white problem began to concern white politicians during the 1920s, when they no longer saw poverty as an irremovable element to humanity, but as a threat to white superiority. Nationalist Afrikaner leaders argued that if a large portion of the white population sunk into a desolate condition their minority rule and structural supremacy would be threatened.²⁸⁵ Church leaders also raised concern such as Johannes du Plessis who voiced this need for white rule within a paternalistic guise, arguing that it was sanctioned not on the accident of colour but on the centuries of Christian social evolution which whites had over the still immature black portion of society.²⁸⁶ The migration of poor Afrikaners from their farms to cities in search of employment brought them into contact with a black workforce, also desperately seeking elevation from their acute poverty. Competition arose in the industrial sector as black workers were willing to do the same jobs for less money, and with many whites not willing to work alongside black workers the friction intensified. Although a civilised labour policy was followed by the government, which ensured higher wages for white workers, the Carnegie Report of 1932 revealed that there were around 300 000 poor whites, with the majority being from the Afrikaner nation.²⁸⁷ Gerdener's congregation contributed notably to the poor white problem in their immediate district, by means of supporting individual needy

²⁸³Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 17 October 1925.

²⁸⁴Dreyer, *Historisch album*, 184.

²⁸⁵Giliomee, *Afrikaner nationalism, 1875-1899*, 304.

²⁸⁶Elphick, *The equality of believers*, 159.

²⁸⁷John de Gruchy, *Christianity and the modernization of South Africa: a documentary history*. Vol 2. (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2009), 174.

white children with a way to education and also by donating to the local branch of the *Vroue federasie*.²⁸⁸ This federation, a kin to the *Afrikaanse Christelike Vrouevereniging*, was exceptionally effective regarding social work and especially in providing care for poor whites.²⁸⁹ The DRC also actively worked towards poverty relief amongst the Afrikaners and in 1933 the *Federale Armesorg raad* was established, which was an amalgamation of the four Synods' social welfare commissions started in the early 1910s.²⁹⁰ In 1932, Gerdener suggested to his parish that an entire day be dedicated to the cause of charity and in the decade to follow he would work closely with the Federal Armesorg raad.²⁹¹

A socially damning consequence of this poverty, in the Afrikaner's view, was the danger of racial mixing. A reality brought about by the close proximity between the African and poor white populations within the social fringes due to financial scarcity. Afrikaner nationalists were beginning to take harsher measures against this miscegenation largely due to the ambiguity which hung over the phenomenon of a coloured population and Gerdener would later make this issue a priority on his racial agenda. Gerdener followed the paternalistic tradition of du Plessis and interestingly argued that social mixing, which he referred to as a "process of bastardization", would be mostly to the demise of the African community as they were, to his mind, not yet mature enough for the weight of European culture. He expressed this through a rhetorical question in 1939: "but what about the contact between a lower tier race and the horrors and crimes of a more developed race?".²⁹² In the spirit of his time, blacks were like children to Gerdener, and required the guardianship of the white nation, a position steeped in 19th century paternalistic missionary influence. As chairman of the church council in Wakkerstroom, Gerdener was already forced to deal with cases of cross-racial relations. Although extramarital relations of any kind were harshly dealt with by DRCs, in 1926 Gerdener was forced to deal with a young lady from his parish that was caught having relations with a black man, and found herself pregnant. It is significant that, as punishment, she was placed under church censorship which barred her from attending church services for an extended period. However, the censorship was not significantly worse than usual except that it was coupled with a stern talking to.²⁹³

Whereas many Afrikaner leaders, such as D.F. Malan, saw the industrial crisis as a structural issue which was to be approached pragmatically, Gerdener was a moralist and

²⁸⁸Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 22 June 1929.

²⁸⁹De Gruchy, *Christianity and the modernization of South*, 125.

²⁹⁰Thys Nieuwoudt, "1915. 'n Reddingsaksie vir armoede" in: *NG Kerk* 350, 166.

²⁹¹Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 18 June 1932.

²⁹²Op die Horison, July 1939.

²⁹³Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 26 March 1926.

diagnosed the root of the crisis to be a deep depravity in the moral fibre of the people. Amidst the uncertain atmosphere caused by capitalist and socialist friction, Gerdener believed that the solution was not to be found in upheaval but rather in character improvement; not in strikes, organisations or unions, but that “more trust, justice and a better understanding points to the solution”.²⁹⁴ As with his spiritual approach to the missional problem years before, the strategist in Gerdener proceeded to address the practical dimension of Afrikaner poverty from this moral foundation. The greatest hindrance to urban Afrikaner development was a lack of education. The Cape DRC already alluded to this crisis in 1916 when it called upon the government to implement compulsory education for whites up to the age of sixteen.²⁹⁵ Gerdener placed great emphasis on education as a catalyst from which a nation could elevate itself, and as a result his moral convictions were channelled into practical action.

The Wakkerstroom parish had a hostel in its possession, which was used as lodging for the local school, and Gerdener dedicated himself to keeping this struggling institution open as he believed it to be an invaluable necessity for the local needy white children. He urged parents to send their children to the school, and to book them into the hostel. “The closing of the hostel”, he continued, “would be a big blow to the town’s school and for the sake of general education”.²⁹⁶ Gerdener rallied parents to support the local school for the sake of the education of the needy children of the community. To his mind the problem of poverty affected the entire volk, and as a result he felt that social ills had to be addressed with a united front. Gerdener’s pleas to the congregation, provincial administration and church leaders were successful and after almost closing its doors on two occasions, the hostel was kept open.²⁹⁷ In 1926 the provincial educational department announced the building of a new school in Wakkerstroom, one which would be better suited to equipping children for the struggles faced by Afrikaners in the industrial sector. The school would be geared towards the training of practical skills with half of the school day dedicated to handiwork, farming and agricultural subjects for boys and hospitality and social subjects for girls.²⁹⁸ Gerdener threw his weight behind this institution and the church hostel facilities were expanded to accommodate the new school.

Gerdener could not separate the history of education in South Africa from that of the church and championed the DRC as a pioneering force behind most of the prominent educational institutions, such as the University of Cape Town, the Huguenot Seminary and the Cape Town Normal College. Of more importance to Gerdener, however, was the DRC’s role

²⁹⁴G.B.A. Gerdener, *Sosiale studies*. (Stellenbosch: CSV, 1927), 19.

²⁹⁵Elphick, *The equality of believers*, 137.

²⁹⁶Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 25 January 1930.

²⁹⁷Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 23 June 1928.

²⁹⁸Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes,

in the assurance of religious instruction in schools and their influence regarding the promotion of Afrikaner history, compulsory education and purposeful instruction in the students' mother-tongue.²⁹⁹ While still in Stellenbosch Gerdener quoted the Bishop of London, saying that: "it is better to teach Latin in a Christian manner, than the Bible in an un-Christian". In so doing he expressed his unwavering support for the role of religion in secular education, by arguing that the only way to improve the moral standards of the educational system was through "the religious teacher".³⁰⁰ Taking this into account, it could be argued that Gerdener would have been an advocate for certain elements of the *Christelik-Nasionale Onderwys* (CNO) system. Established by Boer leaders across the Free-State and Transvaal after the Anglo-Boer war, in response to the threat of Anglicization represented by the English medium state schools, CNO schools were privately founded and funded.³⁰¹ These schools propagated a nationalist-Christian message and upheld the use of Afrikaans. However, CNO would be co-opted and radicalized during the 1930s by the neo-Calvinists based in Potchefstroom, as one of the vehicles through which to achieve their re-shaping of South Africa into a Christian-Nationalist State.³⁰² Gerdener did not lend his support to this neo-Calvinistic Potchefstroom stream but maintained a more moderate stance. That being said, the issue of education, and the implications thereof, would require his serious attention in the years to follow.

A significant moment in Gerdener's progress on his stance towards race relations came in September 1923, when the Federal Council of the DRC hosted a conference to discuss the racial situation at hand, with Gerdener's previous colleague D.S. Botha as chairman. All Protestant churches of South Africa, political leaders, whites, blacks and coloureds were invited with the intention of "better getting to know each other and from the perspective of the Christian civilisation discuss the interests of the European, Native and Coloured, who by the hand of God have been brought to live together in this land".³⁰³ In this conference Afrikaner churchmen such as A.F. Louw sought to set the African delegates' anxieties to rest by emphasising the good intentions of the white man towards his fellow black countryman. Gerdener himself would argue for the eternal equality of races by stating that, when Eve took a bite of the apple in Eden "all of humanity fell into sin. It was not racially specific and it didn't exclude any race".³⁰⁴ This reflected the dichotomy in many Afrikaner churchmen's rationale regarding race, that spiritually all were equal, but that this equality was not directly applicable

²⁹⁹ Gerdener, *kerkgeskiedenis vir ons volk*, 177.

³⁰⁰ Gereformeerde Maandblad, November 1918, 145.

³⁰¹ Giliomee, *Afrikaner nationalism, 1875-1899*, 282.

³⁰² Elphick, *The equality of believers*, 246.

³⁰³ G.B.A. Gerdener, *Reguit koersgehou*. (Kaapstad: N.G. Kerk-uitgewers van Suid-Afrika, 1951), 82.

³⁰⁴ G.B.A. Gerdener, *Die Afrikaner en die Sending*. (Kaapstad: NG Kerk uitgewers, 1959), 14.

to social structure. This dichotomy in thought would continue to develop in the years leading up to apartheid. Voices were raised against Louw from English and African delegates such as Z.R. Mahabane and W.M. Macmillan, with most of the discussion revolving around the acceptable extent of segregation and the disproportions encapsulated within the Native Land Act of 1913.³⁰⁵

The Land Act designated special ‘Native Areas’ justified by the elusive principle that Africans would have autonomy within their areas. Land was divided in a grossly disproportionate manner with the 4,5 million Africans receiving only one-eighteenth of the land, leaving the remaining seventeen parts of the Union for the tiny minority of whites.³⁰⁶ This laid the groundwork for the Urban Areas Act of 1923 and later the Group Areas Act of 1950, under which Africans were by no means able to own any land.³⁰⁷ At the inter-racial conference there was general acceptance of the principle of segregation. While Johannes du Plessis agitated for a comprehensive segregation in all social spheres, Englishmen such as Edgar Brookes dominated the conference with the more moderate suggestion of ‘differential development’ in which black and white interests would be interweaved through selective segregation. Africans also lent support to certain aspects of segregation as beneficial to their people. They did argue, however, that political segregation was unacceptable, and that land segregation was acceptable only if distributed more evenly.³⁰⁸ Total geographic segregation was deemed by the majority as seriously implausible and unrealistic at the conference, a position which the idealistic Gerdener did not agree with.

Due to the success of the conference the DRC Federal Council decided in 1925 to select a permanent commission to carry the momentum of the conference forward; an advisory body which would be tasked with counselling the DRC on matters of race relations. This so-called Native Affairs Commission of the DRC, of which Gerdener was a member and would later become chairman, consisted of seven members such as du Plessis, D.S. Botha and P.G.J. Meiring, most of whom Gerdener had close ties with.³⁰⁹ This marked Gerdener’s first direct involvement with South Africa’s racial dilemma, the beginning of his involvement in the DRC mission policy and a shift in focus in which race-relations would dominate his work until his retirement. South Africa’s racial tension, however, had already made itself felt within Gerdener’s ecclesiastical inner circle. For example, in 1931 the secretary of the Wakkerstroom council was brought under the serious condemnation of many congregants, due to his work as

³⁰⁵Elphick, *The equality of believers*, 155.

³⁰⁶Sol Plaatje, *Native life in South Africa*, (London: P.S. King and Son Ltd., 1916), 24.

³⁰⁷De Gruchy, *Christianity and the modernization of South Africa*, 107.

³⁰⁸Elphick, *The equality of believers*, 156.

³⁰⁹Crafford, *Aan God die dank*, 464.

a lawyer. The council disapprovingly stated that “when a *kaffer* [sic] is accused of stealing livestock, then the secretary defends the black man against the white”.³¹⁰ Gerdener was called upon to diffuse the tension, which he was able to do, marking the start of delicate dealings with racial dilemmas, a significant theme in the ensuing years of his life.

The new Native Affairs Commission (NAC) immediately found itself in the melting pot of racial policy with the introduction of Hertzog’s new legislation. Hertzog became Prime Minister in 1924 after winning the election through the formation of a Pact government, comprising the NP and Labour Party. He now had the power to turn his separatist vision into a reality, which he presented through three bills. In 1926 the NAC called an inter-racial gathering with Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist churches to discuss the Hertzog bills, which included replacing the franchise of Cape blacks with white representatives in parliament, the enlargement of the African reserves and the Colour Bar Act of 1926, which transferred skilled jobs from blacks to whites.³¹¹ The Anglican Bishops fervently opposed Hertzog’s bill. However, only a few amendments were made at the meeting and a delegation was sent to plead with the Prime Minister.³¹² This symbolized the start of the divergence of Africans and English from the DRC, who began to argue for total segregation and the political disenfranchisement of Africans.³¹³ The NP, now in control of the country in Pact form, also bridged the gap between DRC churchmen and Afrikaner statesmen more comprehensively. A trend of DRC ministers with political aspirations was beginning to surface, and one which a leading Wakkerstroom elder, G.A. Kolbe, warned against in a 1929 meeting.³¹⁴ Despite this warning, the blurring of the line between the two spheres became noticeable in Gerdener’s personal ministry. On one occasion in 1928, Gerdener directed a letter to the Town Council in which he expressed outrage at a recent raising of the Union flag which was not combined with a devotional religious ceremony.³¹⁵ In addition, the authority of the NAC steadily grew, by the late 1920s it was already able to call *volk* congresses regarding racial queries and by 1940 direct channels to the Prime Minister were open. Deputations regarding social matters such as native education, racially separate neighbourhoods and mixed marriages were regularly sent to the Prime Minister.³¹⁶ As a result, the DRC began more readily to justify its authority regarding secular matters; a phenomenon far removed from the situation in the previous century and one which would only grow, leading up to the implementation of the 1948 apartheid government.

³¹⁰Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 12 December 1931.

³¹¹De Gruchy, *Christianity and the modernization of South Africa*, 152.

³¹²Gerdener, *Reguit koers gehou*, 83.

³¹³Elphick, *The equality of believers*, 158.

³¹⁴Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 7 December 1929.

³¹⁵Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 23 June 1928.

³¹⁶Meeting minutes of the Native Affairs Commission, 4 October 1938. [DRC Archives in SA, Sin245].

During his stint in Wakkerstroom, Gerdener was also involved in several other societal endeavours related to the interests of the Afrikaner people on both a local and Synodal level. Just as in Stellenbosch, alcohol abuse in the Transvaal was a serious problem and one which Gerdener worked to resolve. By referring to examples throughout the ages, Gerdener confirmed alcoholism to be the most destructive social evil and one which had the power to degrade an entire nation: “an evil which undermines the social structure, and rids the person, who falls prey to it, of all dignity”.³¹⁷ Apart from working amongst individual drinkers and alcohol producers, any hopes of suppressing alcoholism rested on large scale mobilisation which involved legislation and prohibition as well as the entire community united in prayer.³¹⁸ Gerdener implemented this theory into his ministry and was heavily involved in the Transvaal’s fight against alcoholism. When the motion was forwarded in 1927 to import the *dopstelsel* of the Cape, in which farm workers received a measure of cheap wine as a fringe benefit, to the Transvaal, Gerdener led a Synodal commission of 7 members to meet with the Minister of Justice in order to oppose the motion on five principle points. Amongst these was the fear that it would create unhealthy competition amongst farmers and that a certain class of whites would abuse this system with the black population the most affected, as they would be plunged into a state of addiction.³¹⁹ As he did in Stellenbosch, Gerdener’s paternalism placed the responsibility for the state of the black community squarely on the white community’s shoulders. By his final year in Wakkerstroom the battle was still raging and Gerdener called upon all political parties and social bodies to stand behind the Synod’s resistance of the *dopstelsel*, so as to give the minister no choice but to abandon the motion.³²⁰

Gerdener continued his fight for Afrikaner identity in Wakkerstroom in several ways. Upon a request from the Transvaal Synod in 1928, Gerdener, with great help from William Nicol, embarked on three months of archival research in Pietermaritzburg, Pretoria and Bloemfontein. This allowed him to publish his monumental resource book, *Boustowwe vir die Geskiedenis*, in 1930.³²¹ In this 788 page document Gerdener laid out the original sources, documents and events of the Free-State, Transvaal and Natal churches, to be used by church historians as a reference base from which to build their historical works.³²² In so doing Gerdener partly met a need which he had pointed out in 1918, namely that the Afrikaner nation required a sufficient historical guideline in order to stimulate their interest in the past.³²³ Apart

³¹⁷Gerdener, *Sosiale studies*, 30.

³¹⁸*Ibid.*, 31.

³¹⁹Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 12 March 1927.

³²⁰Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 2 April 1932.

³²¹Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 6 October 1928.

³²²G.B.A. Gerdener, *Boustowwe vir die geskiedenis van die Nederduits-Gereformeerde Kerk in die Transgariep*. (Kaapstad: Die Nasionale Pers Beperk, 1930).

³²³Gereformeerde Maandblad, August 1918. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydsk 271].

from his involvement in a memorial erected in Volksrust in remembrance of the First Boer War³²⁴, another part of Gerdener's campaign advocating for an Afrikaner heritage came in the form of his involvement in the *Voortrekker-gedenkfonds*. The DRC Synod of 1925 discussed three major issues which were intended to be simultaneously addressed by this fund. To establish a monumental memorial reminiscent of the Voortrekker story, the need for a Synodal Hall in which important ecclesial meetings could take place and the needy state in which smaller DRC congregations found themselves. Thus, the *Voortrekker-Gedenkfonds* was constituted with the dual goal of collecting the necessary funds for a Synodal Hall, the *Voortrekker-Gedenksaal* in Pretoria and to support needy congregations, with W. Nicol taking the lead in the fundraising campaign.³²⁵

Gerdener was one of the ministers who visited DRC congregations during the fund-raising campaign and took this appeal to the parishes of Greylingstad and Johannesburg between May and June of 1928.³²⁶ Gerdener also served on the five-man commission tasked with the building administration of the hall. On the 8th of April 1931, the building commission delivered its final report at the inauguration of the Voortrekker-Gedenksaal; which included a Voortrekker museum, archive and a main hall for Synod meetings.³²⁷ The fund-raising campaign was a resounding success and was to continue long after the building was completed as a means of supporting desperate DRC congregations. A large reason for this financial success, which raised over £20 000 within five years, was the urgency with which it was presented to Afrikaners. It was depicted as a matter of cultural survival and a necessary means for enhancing Afrikaner self-awareness. In the first pamphlet explaining this fund, William Nicol asserted that, "the history of the Great Trek may not be neglected by our volk. It is part of our lives and beings and the Afrikaner volk will be far poorer if it is to shake itself of its Voortrekker heritage".³²⁸ Apart from symbolizing the DRC's warm sympathies towards the Voortrekker story, the monument also represented the entwining of church and volk. It was a beacon of a *volkskerk* which was becoming deeply rooted within the Afrikaner nation. This was perfectly exemplified by the closing words of the building commissions' report of 1931: "where the commission now hands over the building to the Synod, it is with the petition that from here, through the working of God's Spirit, the church and the volk may be inspired, so

³²⁴Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 30 March 1931.

³²⁵Wm Nicol, *Die Voortrekker-Gedenkfonds*, (Pretoria: Wallachs Bpk, 1925), 8.

³²⁶Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 17 March 1928.

³²⁷Report of the building commission for the Voortrekker-Gedenkfonds, 8 April 1931. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV1761].

³²⁸Nicol, *Die Voortrekker-Gedenkfonds*, 2.

that the silent memory of our glorious past will serve as a healthy incentive to strive for all that is worthy in the future”.³²⁹

Spiritually, Gerdener’s ministry was guided by the evangelical energy of the Andrew Murray school of thought and the devotion of German mission stations. Wakkerstroom congregants were repeatedly urged to lead pure moralistic lives, achieved through a daily routine of morning household devotions. The power and joy which prayer held was constantly emphasized by their minister and so the congregation, especially the youth, were urged to regularly attend church prayer meetings which Gerdener organized.³³⁰ Anything which presented a distraction from proper Christian principles was rigidly suppressed by Gerdener. For example no form of drinking, smoking, gambling, political agendas or dancing was tolerated in the church’s youth hall.³³¹ From the pulpit Gerdener’s sermons, which were all structured along a uniform formula, followed similar themes such as the hopelessness without God, God’s pursuit of a wandering Afrikaner volk, a child-like faith in God as a father to His children on Earth and an emphasis on God’s love, which people were to embody in their compassionate dealings with one another.³³² One notable element of his theology which was reflected in many of his sermons and which would later direct his work on the DRC mission policy, centred around his interpretation of the Great Commission (Matt 28:13-10). Gerdener divided the Great Commission into three parts namely the *besluit*, *belofte* and *bevel* of God and purposefully placed the promise between the decision and command, so as not to let the promise of Jesus be overshadowed by the command. Gerdener preached that, by placing Jesus’ promise of presence at the fore, mission work gained a sense of life and vibrancy. In other words, for Gerdener it meant mission work was not merely a mundane job but rather a natural characteristic of the Christian faith.³³³ Through this interpretation, Gerdener’s missiology merged with his spirituality and further entrenched the idea of the Afrikaners being the chosen bearers of Christianity to the so-called heathen Africans.³³⁴

Gerdener’s pen again contributed significantly to the spiritual affairs of the Afrikaners during this period. In 1925 the DRC Synod discussed the need for a textbook in which the Christian principles of the DRC would be explained and used in the catechism program of all the DRCs. In a July issue the Kerkbode expressed its joy at the news that Gerdener was the man approached with this task by the Federal Council.³³⁵ By 1927 the manuscript, *Handboek*

³²⁹Report of the building commission for the Voortrekker-Gedenkfonds, 8 April 1931. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV1761].

³³⁰Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 29 March 1926.

³³¹Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 26 March 1926.

³³²Gerdener’s sermon notes. [DRC Archives in SA, PPV75].

³³³Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, 11 March 1944. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV226].

³³⁴Gerdener, *Reguit koers gehou*, 86.

³³⁵D.W. de Villiers, *Die kategetese in die Ned. Geref. Kerk in Suid-Afrika*, PhD diss., (Stellenbosch, 1957), 275.

by *die Katkisasie*, was approved with very little amendments by the relevant Synodal commission.³³⁶ With a guiding hand from J.D. du Toit and J.D. Kestell, Gerdener presented the entirety of the DRC in three sections which dealt with historical, confessional and doctrinal topics to serve both “the University student and the farm child from standard five”.³³⁷ This catechism textbook was structured in good simple Afrikaans and was immensely influential. By 1928 it was completely sold out and publishers had to prepare further editions, and by 1956 it had already undergone 22 prints.³³⁸ The consequence of this is that Gerdener had an immense role to play in the spiritual development of generations of Afrikaner children. It was from his textbook that their faith and understanding of the DRC would be shaped. Gerdener underscored the significant position children held in God’s kingdom and remained intimately involved in their religious instruction right up to his final days. Nine months before his death Gerdener entered into correspondence with the 1966 revisory committee, providing notes regarding changes to the book; one being the expansion of the biblical history section.³³⁹

In December 1928, Gerdener asked his church council for six months leave for yet another request that came his way, this time from the South African Bible Society regarding the task of supervising the translation of the church’s Dutch Psalms and songs into Afrikaans.³⁴⁰ Since Afrikaans’ official recognition in the DRC, several private undertakings to translate the Dutch hymns were underway, such as C.J. Langenhoven’s 1922 *Gesange in Afrikaans* and an attempt in 1924 which contained 35 translated songs, co-directed by Gerdener along with J.F.E. Cilliers and P.L. Louw.³⁴¹ It was only when Totius penned his *36 Psalme in Afrikaans*, that the DRC added its official support to the cause.³⁴² The request from the Bible Society was diligently heeded and in 1931 the translated work was released as *Die Nuwe Halleluja*, with Gerdener as its lead editor. The work contained around 75 Psalms, 100 Hymns and 230 translated songs which came from several different song books. The translating of the Psalms came from the hand of Totius, and Gerdener was responsible for the 100 hymns, while the 230 songs were tackled by a wide variety of co-workers.³⁴³ This 1931 work, directed by Gerdener, would prove to be a landmark in the integration of Afrikaans into the church and was used as the basis for the 1944 Afrikaans *Psalm- en Gesangboek*. This 1944 edition was chosen as the official song collection of the DRC and was praised in the Kerkbode as “not only

³³⁶Gerdener, *Handboek by die Katkisasie*.

³³⁷*Ibid.*, II.

³³⁸de Villiers, *Die kategeese in die Ned. Geref. Kerk in Suid-Afrika*, 277.

³³⁹Gerdener correspondences, 30 November 1966. [DRC Archives in SA, PPV73].

³⁴⁰Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 24 December 1928.

³⁴¹E.C. Pienaar, *Die ontstaan van ons Afrikaanse Psalm- en Gesangboek*, [DRC Archives in SA, B3926].

³⁴²Attie Barnard, “1944. Die Psalm- en Gesangboek: ‘n triomf vir kerk en taal” in: *NG Kerk* 350, 186.

³⁴³Pienaar, *Die ontstaan van ons Afrikaanse Psalm- en Gesangboek*, 7.

a new triumph for Afrikaans, but one of even greater significance for the relation between our church and our language”.³⁴⁴ Thus, from his study in Wakkerstroom, Gerdener produced two works which would resonate within the developing Afrikaner identity on both a spiritual and cultural level.

The backbone to Gerdener’s ministry remained mission and it was missional fervour which provided the impetus for each aspect of his spiritual leadership. As with his approach to social and spiritual factors, Gerdener spoke to the deeper moral significance of mission work as a means of increasing interest amongst churchgoers. He did not separate mission work as a duty solely for missionaries but followed in the tradition of Warneck by defining mission work as the very heart of Christianity. However, Gerdener came up against a Transvaal parish still rife with missional opposition, dominated by the fear of its supposed support for social *gelykstelling*. When in 1926 he urged all believers who could speak Zulu, to preach the gospel to blacks, one of his congregants expressed the fear that “when we teach the black, he announces that the white man must leave the land”.³⁴⁵ To this Gerdener responded that “according to scripture it is our duty to bring the gospel to the native and to this end we will all be held responsible for our commitment to this work.”³⁴⁶ Support for a number of missional activities was encouraged and enthusiastically backed by Gerdener, for example the mission congregations’ initiatives, the coloured ladies’ *Susters Sending Vereniging* and the Synod’s Israel mission; a missionary endeavour amongst the Transvaal Jewish community which dramatically increased during the gold rush of the late 19th Century.³⁴⁷ Gerdener’s efforts bore fruit and Wakkerstroom was later listed as the fourth biggest contributor to missional activity within its presbytery.³⁴⁸

The Transvaal DRC organized its mission operation along a tiered structure with the intention that its plans eventually be implemented throughout the local mission commissions of individual congregations.³⁴⁹ These ground level commissions were held accountable by presbytery mission commissions, who in turn were governed by the Synodal mission commission.³⁵⁰ This organizational structure of the Transvaal DRC was thoroughly served in by Gerdener. Locally, apart from encouraging missional energy within the parish, Gerdener identified mission work as a primary Wakkerstroom agenda. Gerdener employed a missionary, N.P.J. Steyn, within his first term and would regularly conduct fund-raising crusades to

³⁴⁴Barnard, “1944. Die Psalm- en Gesangboek: ‘n triomf vir kerk en taal” in: *NG Kerk* 350, 186

³⁴⁵Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 27 March 1926.

³⁴⁶*Ibid.*

³⁴⁷Dreyer, *Historisch Album*, 98.

³⁴⁸Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 26 March 1926.

³⁴⁹J.H.M. Stofberg, “Die teenswoordige toestand van ons sendingwerksaamhede” in: *Wonderdade van God: Jubileumgedenkboek 1842-1942*, (Johannesburg: Voortrekkerpers, 1942), 204.

³⁵⁰Crafford, *Aan God die dank*, 150.

increase financial support for the missionary himself and the mission task at hand. When Steyn was forced to step down as missionary, due to certain allegations which compromised his standing, the council considered replacing him with a black evangelist. Reasoning that “due to the experiences of other congregations, the idea of employing a non-white missionary should best be completely opposed”, Gerdener proposed that a non-ordained white mission worker, fluent in Zulu, be employed to serve as missionary to the Wakkerstroom, Utrecht and Amersfoort congregations.³⁵¹ This came to fruition when C.L. van Rensburg was sworn in as missionary in 1932.³⁵² It was also through Gerdener’s initiative that, just prior to his departure, a new mission church building was approved. This building was to be situated closer to the black location and also be equipped for education purposes.³⁵³

As chairman of the Utrecht presbytery mission commission, Gerdener orchestrated the local mission commissions within his jurisdiction and worked arduously to foster greater missional involvement.³⁵⁴ In 1930 he was elected as the chairman of the Synod mission commission, a role which he would need to balance with that of actuary of the Synod, which he held from 1928 to 1934. From here Gerdener took leadership in organizing the church’s mission events, conferences and agenda. Furthermore, Gerdener was involved in the expansion and development of mission work into North-Zululand while providing clarity as to what was understood under the ‘office’ of an evangelist.³⁵⁵

Gerdener’s greatest service to the Transvaal was arguably his work in establishing its own independent mission church in 1932; the last of the four DRC branches to establish an organized mission church. By 1921 such a desire could already be heard from within the Transvaal, but it was not until 1928 that a commission was put together and tasked with setting the wheels in motion for organizing mission congregations into an independent organization.³⁵⁶ The three-man commission of Gerdener, Nicol and G.M. Pellissier had the responsibility of drawing up a constitution for the proposed church. This constitution, which Gerdener was largely responsible for, was based on the Cape church’s mission constitution. It did, however, place greater emphasis on the idea of separate independence due to the still prevalent Transvaal fear of *gelykstelling*. Paternalistic sentiments were evident in this document and, as a result, initially only whites were allowed to take up leadership roles on presbytery and Synodal levels.³⁵⁷ In 1931 the constitution was approved and in March 1932 the DRC Transvaal mission

³⁵¹Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 7 December 1929.

³⁵²Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 30 January 1932.

³⁵³Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 18 June 1932.

³⁵⁴Crafford, *Aan God die dank*, 150.

³⁵⁵Van der Watt, *G.B.A. Gerdener*, 136.

³⁵⁶Crafford, *Aan God die dank*, 157.

³⁵⁷Van der Watt, *G.B.A. Gerdener*, 138.

church was established, with Gerdener in the mission Synod's chairman seat.³⁵⁸ The Transvaal mission church was founded with the intention of becoming gradually independent, a formula which Gerdener strongly encouraged. Compared to preceding decades, by 1941 white and black mission church ministers were granted more initiative regarding their church laws and regulations. The Transvaal mission church grew rapidly and by the time Gerdener co-founded the FMC in 1942, it had six presbyteries which organized 52 congregations culminating in a membership of 25 000³⁵⁹.

Amidst the general excitement of the mission church developments, Gerdener was dealt the painful blow of his wife's death. He found the pain and loneliness unbearable, to such an extent that he asked the missionary and his wife to lodge with him in an attempt to fill the large empty rooms of the parsonage.³⁶⁰ Before Gerdener could complete his mourning process, however, he received a call which would take his life yet again in a new direction. He was approached by the Wellington Mission Institute and offered the position of lecturer. It was an offer which he could not refuse. He was convinced "that it is the call of the Lord, and as a son of a missionary and having also been a missionary before, I feel, that I must follow this calling."³⁶¹

Gerdener's final church council meeting as a DRC minister took place on the 26th of December 1932. His dedicated work in the congregation did not go unnoticed and upon hearing of his departure, several young members of the congregation came forward with the special request that they be confirmed as church members by Gerdener before he left.³⁶² With Wakkerstroom and the Transvaal behind him, Gerdener set his sights on the new challenges which lay ahead of him in this new role as missionary educator. This return to the Cape Province would also spell the beginning of his involvement in the prevalent racial questions of the day, with the native and coloured issues front and centre.

³⁵⁸Kerkbode, July-December 1967, 411.

³⁵⁹"Vooruitgang op sending gebied in die Transvaal 1930-1940", [DRC Archives in SA, Sin 245].

³⁶⁰Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 18 June 1932.

³⁶¹Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 29 October 1932.

³⁶²Wakkerstroom DRC church council minutes, 10 December 1932.

Chapter III: *Turbulent missiological development of the 1930s*

Apart from his notoriety as a historian and the prominent influence he had on the developing cultural identity of the Afrikaner nation, Gerdener was primarily known as a prestigious missiologist and mission strategist during the mid-20th Century. This role would begin crystallizing as Gerdener entered a town rich with mission heritage as the new lecturer in the Wellington Mission Institute, established by the famous evangelical Andrew Murray.

As a missiological educator, Gerdener was simultaneously afforded direct contact to missional issues as well as a platform from which to exert influence. As his stature grew in the field so did his responsibility, during a time when the DRC began to express an ever-increasing need to a federate its missional position. Gerdener would subsequently play a significant role in the process of federating and reforming the DRC mission; a role for which he would also be most remembered. In addition, this time in Gerdener's life is one marked by theological progression, development of missiological expertise and manoeuvring into a leadership position within the formulation of DRC missional policy as well as secular racial strategies.

DRC in theological turmoil

Gerdener once again entered a new town with a new role to fulfil and with this fresh context came a new wife, Marie Visser, who was the young widow of the famous Afrikaans author A.G. Visser. Early in 1933 the now extended Gerdener family moved into the well-known Wellington hostel, which was established by Andrew Murray himself. The residence, known as House Samuel, nurtured an atmosphere of missional enthusiasm amongst its students, which made a favourable impression on the new lecturer from Wakkerstroom who, by April of that year, had started his work in the Mission Institute.³⁶³ Gerdener began his path as theological educator in the wake of one of the greatest controversies to ever hit the DRC, one better known as the church case against Johannes du Plessis and one which he described as “the most important doctrinal case in the history of the Dutch Reformed Church”.³⁶⁴ This was the second theological strife which the DRC had faced within a century. The first of which took place during the second half of the 19th Century with the battle predominantly led by the evangelical Seminary professors John Murray and N.J. Hofmeyr pitted against the imported

³⁶³van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener*, 144.

³⁶⁴Gerdener, *Die boodskap van 'n man*, 226.

liberal currents from Europe.³⁶⁵ Gerdener drew lines of comparison between the controversy of the 1800s and the du Plessis trial which, although formally brought to an end 14 months before he entered the Wellington Institute, was still apparent within the essence of the DRC. “They both gravitated around doctrine, they both spanned over several years, both had an aftermath in the civil court of law, and both deeply agitated the wider ecclesiastical public”.³⁶⁶

Johannes du Plessis was one of the greatest intellectuals to ever pass through the DRC, and an internationally revered theologian and missiological expert. Beyers Naudé, the famous anti-apartheid activist, was a student in Stellenbosch during Du Plessis’ time and described him as “one of the most capable theologians in the history of the DRC”.³⁶⁷ Du Plessis dedicated his younger years to scholarship and soon rose through the ecclesial ranks. At thirty-five he became the first General Missions secretary and by the time he accepted a professorship at the Stellenbosch Seminary in 1916, he had already traversed the African continent three times and published his findings in the book, *Thrice through the dark continent*.³⁶⁸ Academically, Du Plessis was responsible for New Testament and missiological subjects at the Seminary, as well as lecturing Hebrew at the University. In these fields, and even though he had a serious hearing impediment, Du Plessis’ work was marked with an expert thoroughness.³⁶⁹ It was in this position of tertiary educator that Du Plessis’ modernistic theological views began to create waves which eventually led to his condemnation as a heretic.

The du Plessis trial formally started in 1928 and can be described as the boiling point in the conflict between the two hermeneutical streams which were brought in from the Netherlands. Du Plessis was part of the generation which traditionally received their education from the University of Utrecht, and he accepted the modernist approach which crucially entailed the method of Higher Criticism. An approach which advocated an objective and critical investigation into the Bible. On the other hand, his accusers mainly received their education from Abraham Kuyper’s Vrije University in Amsterdam, and as a result brought back with them a more fundamentalist understanding of biblical authority known as neo-Calvinism.³⁷⁰ Du Plessis was a polemist and did not shy away from confrontation when seeking the truth. Epitomized by words he uttered in the midst of the trial: “the truth (is) more important than ecclesiastical harmony”.³⁷¹ This could already be seen in 1910 when, as editor of *De Kerkbode*, he reacted to a dissertation written by a student from the Vrije University, in which

³⁶⁵E.E. van Rooyen, “Die Teologiese Kweekskool en die handhawing van die Gereformeerde leer” In: *Gedenkboek van die Teol. Seminarie Stellenbosch*. (Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia Drukkery, 1934), 143.

³⁶⁶Gerdener, *Die boodskap van ‘n man*, 218.

³⁶⁷Beyers Naudé, *My land van hoop: die lewe van Beyers Naudé*. (Kaapstad: Human & Rousseau, 1995), 23.

³⁶⁸Elphick, *The equality of believers*, 151.

³⁶⁹Gerdener, *Die boodskap van ‘n man*, 135.

³⁷⁰Koorts, *DF Malan and the rise of Afrikaner Nationalism*, 43.

³⁷¹Elphick, *The equality of believers*, 161.

the student denounced the Utrecht school for removing the element of faith in religion and making it totally dependent on reason.³⁷² Du Plessis closed his rebuttal by arguing that the student wanted to persuade readers to discard their old faith for the new narrow and strict confessional route of Kuyper, and that this needed to be warded off. It should, however, be noted that du Plessis' intention was never to neglect or diminish the spirituality of the DRC, in fact he held it tremendously dear.³⁷³

Within a rising tide of fundamental conservatism, Du Plessis sought to expound his progressive views as he believed that the DRC had to adapt to a changing world. To his mind the theory of evolution, which he saw as compatible with the Bible's creation story, and Higher Criticism had to be incorporated so as to keep the interest of the more scientifically trained youth.³⁷⁴ With this underlying agenda, the position of theological professor afforded him the perfect platform from which to propagate his views. In 1923 he launched his journal, *Het Zoeklicht*, in which he made his moderate and critical voice heard regarding various topics, including the racial problem.³⁷⁵ *Het Zoeklicht* was initially published with the intention of facilitating friendly discussion regarding doctrinal issues, and in general this responsible spirit was broadly upheld. However, already within its first year there were signs of a brewing storm, when prof. E.E. van Rooyen, a Vrije University Alumnus, defended the literal interpretation of the biblical story of Jonah against Du Plessis' recommendation of understanding it allegorically.³⁷⁶ By 1926 the friendly spirit had all but dissipated as the board of the Seminary received its first set of complaints against du Plessis' teachings and "the dangerous direction of *Het Zoeklicht*".³⁷⁷ After meeting on this matter, the board agreed that some of du Plessis' teachings were in contradiction to the DRC confessions and instituted an investigation to determine if these thoughts truly were du Plessis' own and whether or not he was conveying these convictions to his students.³⁷⁸ In response, Du Plessis confirmed that they were indeed his position and that he openly taught them in his classes. He then continued to shine the spotlight onto his accusers by challenging them to point out the biblical chapter and verse which could prove his orientation false. This led to a word of warning being issued by D.S Botha and P.S. van Heerden, two curators from the Seminary.³⁷⁹ In the same year Dwight R. Snyman, a conservative DRC minister who carried weight amongst the curators, started a journal of his

³⁷²van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener*, 49.

³⁷³Gerdener, *Die boodskap van 'n man*, 89.

³⁷⁴F.A. Mouton, *Prophet without honour. F.S. Malan: Afrikaner, South African and Cape liberal*. (Pretoria: Protea book house, 2011), 145.

³⁷⁵Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 416.

³⁷⁶Gerdener, *Die boodskap van 'n man*, 219.

³⁷⁷Ferreira, *Die Teologiese Seminarium*, 169.

³⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 169.

³⁷⁹Gerdener, *Die boodskap van 'n man*, 222.

own, *Die Ou Paaie*, as a counter to *Het Zoeklicht* and with the intention of fighting Du Plessis' modernism.³⁸⁰ These two journals represented the two sides of the battle and essentially split the DRC leadership in half, with ecclesiastical leaders aligning themselves with one or the other side.³⁸¹ The stark contrast between the two camps becomes most profoundly clear when looking at the response by D.G. Malan, a lead prosecutor and a minister in Paarl at the time, to a changing world as opposed to that of Du Plessis'. Malan argued that the only hope for the DRC's survival was to hold onto old ways, to cling to fundamental Christian principles as found in the Bible and to reject modernism.³⁸²

At the end of 1927 the board, upon receiving increased pressure from several DRC presbyteries regarding the teaching of Higher Criticism, selected a commission consisting of P.G.J. Meiring, D.G. Malan and D.R. Snyman, and tasked them with laying out the points of du Plessis' teaching which it considered deviant. At the start of the following year the board met with du Plessis, and the three points around which the case gravitated were dealt with. These were as follows: the undermining of Bible authority, the acceptance of Higher Criticism which went against the traditional understanding of the DRC and the disregard for the divine authority of Jesus. Du Plessis refused to compromise his position or alter the character of his journal.³⁸³ This set the wheels in motion for a long and bitter church struggle, which formally started when the theological board handed their complaint regarding du Plessis over to the Stellenbosch presbytery on the 26th of March 1928.³⁸⁴

After a fleeting attempt at peace, the complaint was issued a second time, and in August the presbytery met and concluded that there were no grounds for guilt.³⁸⁵ The board then took the appeal to the Cape Synod who referred the case back to the Stellenbosch presbytery with the order of instituting an investigation into du Plessis' doctrine. In September 1929 the Presbytery could again find no evidence of guilt and declared a verdict of innocence with the condition that du Plessis be more cautious going forward.³⁸⁶ The curators of the Seminary could not accept this verdict and appealed to the extraordinary Cape synod as they believed the matter was too important to be handled by a presbytery. This fire was significantly fuelled by D.G. Malan, who ignored the warnings that this appeal would lead to a civil case and damage the image of the DRC. These warnings were issued to him by his brother, Senator F.S. Malan, who was a du Plessis sympathizer and shared du Plessis' organically progressive premise that

³⁸⁰Elphick, *The equality of believers*, 160.

³⁸¹Gerdener, *Die boodskap van 'n man*, 221.

³⁸²Mouton, *Prophet without honour*, 147.

³⁸³Ferreira, *Die Teologiese Seminarium*, 170.

³⁸⁴Die kerksaak tussen Prof. J. Du Plessis en die Ned. Geref. Kerk in Suid Afrika: 'n woordelike verslag van die verrigtinge, met die uitspraak, in die Hooggeregshof, Kaapstad, November-December 1931. (Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers, 1931), 1.

³⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 2.

³⁸⁶Gerdener, *Die boodskap van 'n man*, 224.

dogma should not be blindly followed based on the fact that one's parents and grandparents abided by it.³⁸⁷ However, D.G. Malan was caught up in prejudice and soldiered on; a testament to how deep the schismatic consequences of this controversy was, as it tore friends and even families apart. The extraordinary Synod found du Plessis guilty in February 1930 which led to du Plessis opening a case against the Synod in civil court two months later. Du Plessis won the case with the verdict being read on the 15th of January 1932. He was, however, still not allowed to return to his beloved professorship. A subsequent extraordinary Synod decided that the only solution to the problem was to retrench du Plessis with all benefits intact and to remove the censorship placed on him in 1930, returning to him the possibility of being appointed by the DRC as a minister. Gerdener described du Plessis and his solitary battle against fundamentalist currents in the church in terms of martyrdom for modernity: "Johannes du Plessis was ahead of his time and environment and in order to prepare that time for his orientation and to ripen the environment to his position, he had to pay the highest price."³⁸⁸ When the dust had finally settled, the case had lasted almost five years and costed an estimated £15 000. In addition, the destruction it left in its wake would have grave consequences for the DRC and South Africa in the coming years.³⁸⁹

An immediate result of the decision to terminate du Plessis from the Theological Seminary, was the ushering in of conservative voices in leading DRC theological debates. This led to a fundamentalist vacuum for the next two decades and the muzzling of any critical voices.³⁹⁰ The curators now only appointed trustworthy and 'safe' theological professors so as to avoid a repeat of the upheaval caused by du Plessis. This led to a dull and tense atmosphere in the Seminary as all critical discussions, which are so essential to the essence of theology, were suppressed.³⁹¹ This atmosphere would still be tangibly present when Gerdener entered the Seminary five years later, as du Plessis' successor and as professor of missions.

As with other confrontations which concerned him, it is difficult to squarely place Gerdener within the du Plessis saga, as he did not speak publicly on the matter. However, the nature of the controversy called for those involved to choose sides, and indirectly it is clear where Gerdener's sentiments lay. Gerdener had a deep admiration for du Plessis, with whom he fostered a dear friendship. This naturally led to him becoming a biographer of du Plessis when he published *Die boodskap van 'n man* in 1943, in which he documented du Plessis'

³⁸⁷Mouton, *Prophet without honour*, 151.

³⁸⁸Gerdener, *Die boodskap van 'n man*, 231.

³⁸⁹Ibid., 224-226.

³⁹⁰Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 417.

³⁹¹Naudé, *My land van hoop*, 24.

life.³⁹² At du Plessis' death in 1935, Gerdener further expressed this appreciation for his "beloved friend" through a poem entitled *Vaarwel*, in which he glorified du Plessis as a pioneer in Africa whose voice would continue to sound for generations and whom "God supported all the way."³⁹³ The image used by Gerdener, of God's favour resting upon Johannes' endeavour, was used by him several times and portrays, to an extent, his sympathy for du Plessis' position.

It was also mainly due to Gerdener's influence that, during the ensuing case, the Transvaal Synod took a much more understanding position towards du Plessis compared to the Free State Synod.³⁹⁴ In principle, the Transvaal expressed its wariness towards Higher Criticism's theories on Pentateuchal authorship and stated its support of "the traditional understanding of Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch".³⁹⁵ That being said, in 1934 a Synodal study commission, of which Gerdener had been chairman, declared that Higher Criticism was not entirely unwelcome: "Higher Criticism, a method of scientific Scriptural study, which busies itself with the investigation into the origin, compilation, authorship and history of the various Biblical books, is a necessary part of the theological sciences... and has produced valuable fruit".³⁹⁶ The Free State Synod, on the other hand, embodied a much harder anti-du Plessis attitude, so much so that twelve years later it raised concerns regarding Gerdener's biography on du Plessis, and argued against the release of it as it feared that the appraisal of du Plessis would only open up old wounds.³⁹⁷ This reflects yet another damaging consequence of the du Plessis trial; that of strained inter-DRC relations. It could be argued that the case caused fresh tension between the Northern and Southern Synods based on doctrinal orientation, which subsequently filtered down through the congregations and even ministers. This state of tension was evident in the rocky relationship between Gerdener and the Free State mission secretary, J.G. Strydom. In 1944 Strydom sent a letter to J.H.M Stofberg, at this stage chairman of the FMC, in connection with a dispute regarding his brochure, *Die rassevraagstuk en die toekoms van die blankes in SA*, in which he lamented that "it is only Dr. Gerdener and a few others from the Cape mission commission who don't like me personally and I am sure not one of them have read through my brochure and moved it from table purely because of my name... the judgement and dislike against me personally from the Cape faction must stop now". Later in the same letter he expressed his frustrations by writing that, "the Cape church looks down on the Free-State church. Each church handles its issues differently and shouldn't be broken down for it".³⁹⁸

³⁹²Gerdener, *Die boodskap van 'n man*.

³⁹³"*Vaarwel*" In: Die Kerkbode 27 February 1935. [DRC Archives in SA, PPV 73].

³⁹⁴van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener*, 51.

³⁹⁵Verslag van die Sinodale Leerkommissie van die HooogerwaardeSinode van 1934. (Pretoria: Goede Hoop Drukkery, 1934), 11.

³⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 11.

³⁹⁷Ferreira, *Die Teologiese Seminarium*, 168.

³⁹⁸Letter between JG Strydom and JHM Stofberg. 22 November 1944. [DRC Archives in SA, SIN 2437].

The positions taken during the du Plessis case reflected the dogmatic position of each involved and would certainly have contributed in intensifying these personal quarrels. Gerdener was critical of neo-Calvinism and therefore also of JG Strydom's nationalist thinking, which he dubbed chaotic and exaggerated.³⁹⁹ However much, or if, these quarrels were affected by the trial, it can be said that Gerdener was a du Plessis man. It is almost certain that, because of his sentiments regarding du Plessis Gerdener was not selected as a theological professor on two occasions during the early 1930s, even though he was clearly the most qualified candidate, until finally being appointed in 1937.⁴⁰⁰

Gerdener's thoughts on various fields, ranging from his theology to his social understanding of race, were definitively influenced by Johannes du Plessis. Ecclesiastically, Gerdener also associated himself with the ecumenical Protestant circles in South Africa. Gerdener regularly called upon the DRC to invest more energy into ecumenical cooperation and through the editorship of his journal, *Op Die Horison*, he would also suggest amalgamation with the Christian Council of South Africa.⁴⁰¹ This Christian Council, of which only the Transvaal DRC initially joined through the minister William Nicol, would become obsolete within Afrikaner ecclesial circles with the eventual establishment of the FMC, which consolidated the four DRCs.⁴⁰² Gerdener also strove for better liaison with English and black Christians. A project modelled around du Plessis' previous implementation of Christian networks through conferences and various interactions across ethnic and cultural divides.⁴⁰³

Theologically, Gerdener also followed du Plessis in standing within the evangelical tradition, while still firmly rooted in Calvinist doctrine. During this time of debate, it was important for Gerdener to make it plain that he was still a Calvinist. He agreed with his friend Dr. A. Murray jnr., who helped him in writing du Plessis' biography, when he distinguished between the two streams by placing the "cold and numb" doctrine of neo-Calvinism in juxtaposition to the "warm humanism of the Afrikaner-Calvinism".⁴⁰⁴ This humanist aspect of Calvin's teachings would later intentionally be suppressed and warped by neo-Calvinist theologians such as F.J.M. Potgieter during the second half of the 20th Century in defence of the apartheid system. Broadly, this was due to the suspected fear that humanism would open the door to communism.⁴⁰⁵ Gerdener further understood Calvin as a reformer which meant that he believed that confessions of faith had limited authority, unlike the Bible, which he believed

³⁹⁹Elphick, *The equality of believers*, 235.

⁴⁰⁰van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener*, 51.

⁴⁰¹*Op Die Horison*, 1942, No. 4, 143.

⁴⁰²*Op Die Horison*, 1941, No. 1, 165-169.

⁴⁰³Elphick, *The equality of believers*, 301.

⁴⁰⁴van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener*, 52.

⁴⁰⁵John de Gruchy, *John Calvin: Christian humanist and evangelical reformer*. (Wellington: Lux Verbi.BM, 2009), 41.

to be the infallible word of God.⁴⁰⁶ This dates back to the 16th Century reformers who sought to resolve the problem of Scriptural authority and interpretation through the creation of confessional statements. This in turn created a new tradition of an ever-changing process of interpretation due to an ever-changing context. John de Gruchy notes that this tradition led to the formation of two dominant groups: “those who regard its confessions as absolute, and those who regard it as products of history, open to varying contextual interpretations.”⁴⁰⁷ Gerdener formed part of the latter group and argued that confessions were human formulations and so could never be infallible. He consequently classified confessions as secondary sources which were constantly to be held against biblical reckoning, which he understood as the primary source. This logic could be seen when Gerdener sought to bridge the antagonism between reason and faith during the du Plessis saga. He saw the validity of both, however he argued that human reason was limited and that it was only valuable in its capacity as a medium through which to better understand the wonders of God through faith.⁴⁰⁸

After the formalities of the case had run their course, the optimistic Gerdener could not help but find the silver lining in these years of turmoil: “they force us all to return to God’s Word as the only true guideline and to prayer as the medium through which to place ourselves under the assured guidance of the God of all truth.”⁴⁰⁹ This statement drew upon Gerdener’s personal code of religious obedience and spirituality which were key markers in his navigation of the trial as well as within wider doctrinal discrepancies.

An educator of mission

The Wellington Mission Institute largely owed its founding to the wave of DRC revivals, and the resultant stimulation of renewed missional interest amongst students during the 1860s.⁴¹⁰ With this energy surging through the DRC, coupled with an increased need for workers amongst the coloured and black population, the Wellington Institute was founded in October 1877 with Andrew Murray as head. It was initially, however, more of a school hostel under the management of the Wellington DRC consisting of ten pupils; only two of whom were prospective missionary students.⁴¹¹ In 1882 the Institute gained more independence within the DRC when the cornerstone of its own building was laid by N.J. Hofmeyr with the

⁴⁰⁶van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener*, 53.

⁴⁰⁷de Gruchy, *John Calvin*, 148.

⁴⁰⁸van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener*, 53.

⁴⁰⁹Gerdener, *Die boodskap van 'n man*, 218.

⁴¹⁰Crafford, *Aan God die dank*, 58.

⁴¹¹A. Dreyer, *Kruisgesante in Suid-Afrika: Jubileum-Gedenkboek van die Sendinginstituut op Wellington 1877-1927*. (Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers, 1927), 61.

intention “to prepare missionaries for the domestic and foreign missionary work of our Church as well as religious teachers, including those who give religious instruction beside regular school subjects, so as to suitably prepare young people for membership in the Church, for leading prayer meetings and religious exercises”.⁴¹² Gerdener entered this rich history of missionary training when he replaced D. Wilcocks and was inaugurated as lecturer, together with his also newly elected colleague, C.F. Kies. Gerdener and Kies were responsible for the training of missionary students, one of whom was C.H. Badenhorst, who would later himself become a lecturer at the Institute. Badenhorst would also subsequently exert a certain influence through his position on the 1950s Commission for Socio-Economic Development of the Bantu Areas within the Union of South Africa.⁴¹³ Coupled with the task of equipping prospective missionaries was the added responsibility of lecturing to the students in Friedenheim, an institution in Wellington which offered courses in social work, missionary work and biblical instruction to girls.⁴¹⁴ In 1935 the lecturing force of the Institute was strengthened with the addition of a third lecturer, J.H. Greyvenstein, who was handed the subjects of ethnic studies and Bantu languages.⁴¹⁵

Gerdener’s missiological theory, which he relayed to his students, was based on two fundamental ideas. In the introductory section of his 1959 work, *Die Afrikaner en die Sending*, Gerdener speaks about these two fundamentals when he states that: “although the mission, with its fixed Biblical foundation, has the same claim on the American and the South-Islanders as on the Afrikaner; the latter mentioned still has a past with its own tradition and position of the world map”.⁴¹⁶ In other words, Gerdener embedded his missiology primarily in the universality of biblical truth as well as simultaneously in history. The events of which he believed played a determinative role in mission work and the manner in which it was to be contextually understood.

First and foremost, it was Gerdener’s understanding of the Christian religion which fed his missiology. To his mind, although other world religions held partial beauty and truth, it was Christianity which was the ultimate, absolute and universal religion. Where all other world religions were ethnically limited, Christianity was “universal – for all times and lands... Christianity is all encompassing”.⁴¹⁷ It was upon this conviction that Gerdener justified the impetus and urgency of mission work. While still a lecturer at the Seminary, Johannes Du

⁴¹²Gedenskrif 1881-1956, uitgegee by geleentheid van die driekwarteeufeesviering van die Ned. Geref. Sendingkerk in Suid-Afrika. [DRC Archives in SA, G 384 NGSK].

⁴¹³Wellington Mission Institute yearbook 1958. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydskrifte Sending-Instituut Wellington], 14.

⁴¹⁴Wellington Mission Institute yearbook, 1952. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydskrifte Sending-Instituut Wellington], 7.

⁴¹⁵Wellington Mission Institute yearbook 1958. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydskrifte Sending-Instituut Wellington], 12.

⁴¹⁶GBA Gerdener, *Die Afrikaner en die sending*. (Kaapstad: NG Kerk-Uitgewers, 1959), 1.

⁴¹⁷Gerdener, *Die Afrikaner en die sending*, 8.

Plessis taught of the evidence for mission throughout the Old and New Testament, not in specific references to biblical passages but rather in its essence.⁴¹⁸ Gerdener followed his mentor's view and held that mission was not an element of Christianity but that it was its very being: "it is in the very essence of Christianity that it needs to expand itself."⁴¹⁹ For both du Plessis and Gerdener, the Bible was not a book which mentioned mission, it was rather a missional book. A supplementary directive to Gerdener's missiological paradigm arose from his perception of God as a missiologist. He understood the Christian God to be unique in that this was the only god who pursued humanity and not vice versa. This resolved into the idea of God as the initiator of the missional task. God was the one who reached out to human suffering. To Gerdener, God was revealed as creator, reconciler, saviour and exemplar which provided further undisputed proof that the Christian church was indeed a missional one.⁴²⁰ In a 1945 ordination sermon for the young missionary D.F. Malan (not to be confused with Dr Malan), Gerdener expanded on this idea by stating that mission work existed purely because Jesus was already actively busy within the missional task through the Holy Spirit: "Christianity is a missionary religion par excellence as it rests in the first instance on the indwelling and collaborative Christ... Upon what He is and what He wants to do in me rests that task and calling".⁴²¹

Ecclesiologically, Gerdener taught that the church was an extension of this work initiated by God and validated this position pneumatologically by stating that the church and its members were the vehicle through which the Holy Spirit continued God's advancing work to the world. Gerdener understood this ongoing task fluidly and conveyed this concept to his students in a logical manner. "It is not surprising that God had the book of Acts written by one of the four Gospel authors and that Luke emphatically declared that his second narrative – that of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit – begins where the first – that of the Cross and the resurrection - ends".⁴²² With this orientation, Gerdener intimately embedded mission within the Trinitarian understanding of Christianity. Referring to missional motives Gerdener also found himself rooted primarily within this paradigm. When delivering a sermon on 1 Corinthians 9:16 he argued that any and every missional motive was to be put under the spotlight of God's Word. Finally concluding that the only viable motivation was one which "comes from a heart set on fire by Jesus' love... this, the love motive, is the highest motive".⁴²³

⁴¹⁸Elphick, *Equality of believers*, 223.

⁴¹⁹Gerdener, *Die Afrikaner en die sending*, 9.

⁴²⁰Gerdener, *Die Afrikaner en die sending*, 9.

⁴²¹Op Die Horison, March 1945. No. 1

⁴²²Op Die Horison, March 1945. No. 1.

⁴²³Sermon on 1 Corinthians 9:16. [DRC Archives in SA, PPV75].

Once a firm biblical base for his missiology was ensured, Gerdener characteristically shifted his attention to the historiographical. Gerdener was able to follow the route taken by Christianity – from Pauls’ mission to Asia, to the centuries-long development of Christian civilization in Europe, to the eventual spread of Christianity and specifically the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck in Cape Town – not as a coincidence but as a preconceived divine plan.⁴²⁴ By frequently drawing upon teachings in the book of Proverbs and its insistence on history’s repeating character, Gerdener consulted the past as a guiding and normative measure to mission. As a result the face of mission within each unique nation was, to his mind, shaped by that nation’s historical course.⁴²⁵ “Each has its own past and its own duties and calling for the future”.⁴²⁶ When related to the Afrikaners and their initial laxity towards mission, for example, Gerdener looked for evidence in their past to try and explain this phenomenon. Typical of his era, Gerdener ascribed the cause of this historical negligence to the unique context in which the Afrikaners found themselves; a small minority of Christians amongst a majority of wild heathens leading to a tradition of exclusivity for the ends of cultural preservation. With specific reference to the Afrikaners in the Transvaal, Gerdener continued to explain the negative impact which this historical reality had on mission work: “with the intention of keeping religion and civilization pure amidst an unprecedented lower tiered primitive lifestyle, the spontaneous presentation of the gospel with all its implications was not seldom restricted and even withheld. Throughout the years, the Afrikaner tended to isolate himself as soon as he senses the danger of cultural drowning”.⁴²⁷ As mentioned in the previous chapter, Gerdener made use of his historical perspective in an attempt to stimulate missional interest and mobilization of the Afrikaner volk for the sake of mission, and regularly did so through a glorified missional portrayal of the Voortrekker story.⁴²⁸ He depicted the Voortrekkers as having, “worked towards a healthy mission policy, with protection of their own rights to be able to lead an independent, peaceful and Christian life... to establish their own church and worship independently”.⁴²⁹

Gerdener’s blending of culture, history and religion came to the fore most prominently during the Afrikaner’s centenary commemoration of the Great Trek in 1938. The emotionally charged celebrations, organised by the *Afrikaanse Taal- en Kultuurvereniging*, ignited mass patrimonial enthusiasm amongst Afrikaners. In many ways the centenary celebrations of the Great Trek, which included a re-enactment of the event with two sets of wagons trekking from

⁴²⁴Gerdener, *Reguit koers gehou*, 11.

⁴²⁵Gerdener, *Die Afrikaner en die sending*, 52.

⁴²⁶Wellington yearbook, 1935. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydskrifte Sending-Instituut Wellington].

⁴²⁷Gerdener, *Die Afrikaner en die sending*, 76.

⁴²⁸Gerdener, *’n Eeu van genade: 1838-1938*, 14.

⁴²⁹Wellington Mission Institute yearbook 1936, [DRC Archives in SA, Tydskrifte Sending-Instituut Wellington].

Cape Town to Pretoria and North Natal respectively, awoke a sleeping giant within Afrikaner nationalism. Since the end of the Boer war in 1902, due largely to painful and embarrassing remnants left in the Afrikaner psyche, a deafening silence hung over Afrikaner history in the public discourse. In the 1930s, however, spurred on by the centenary celebrations, a new generation of Afrikaners rewrote the story of their past in heroic and glorious terms.⁴³⁰ Gerdener, at this time a professor in Stellenbosch, saw the momentum of this cultural ecstasy as an opportunity to infuse a missional dimension into the narrative. At his recommendation, the DRC convened an extensive mission conference in Bloemfontein to commemorate the work done by the church for the sake of evangelism, which by that point spanned over a Century.⁴³¹ In addition, Gerdener also found himself in the vice-chairman seat of the ensuing missionary conference and delivered its opening statement. In this statement Gerdener marked the centenary of the Great Trek not only as a milestone for Afrikaner heritage but also for DRC mission work. He then proceeded to present an illustrious image of the Voortrekkers as missional pioneers by playing on the metaphor of the 1938 Trek: “the ox-wagons which now cross our land in their symbolic Trek, have aroused a flood of enthusiasm, and one longs for a spiritual equivalent for that enthusiasm which will find its lasting fruit in the victory of the gospel over paganism”.⁴³² Gerdener’s pen was also put to use in a celebratory pamphlet, *‘n Eeu van Genade 1838-1938*, in which he expanded on the idea of the Voortrekkers as archetype missionaries. In so doing, Gerdener acted sympathetically towards the Great Trek and critically entwined religion, specifically the missional task, into the core event of the Afrikaner’s cultural story. “Even on the road of the Trek, and at the planting of the Northern states, a good nature towards the expansion of God’s Kingdom shines through... furthermore that great volk migration opened the road for the gospel amongst the heathens”.⁴³³

This missional theory of Gerdener’s, in which he amalgamated a biblical foundation with a historical and cultural one, was reminiscent of 19th Century theorists such as Gustav Warneck.⁴³⁴ One point of deviation from this Warneck tradition, however, had to do with the role which humanity played within the missional relationship. Gerdener argued that each non-believer had within them a certain God-given light which they would inevitably be brought into confrontation with by their conscience. This rendered the heathen accountable to the light and so their fate was to be left in the hands of God. This led Gerdener to the conclusion that

⁴³⁰Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners*, 432.

⁴³¹van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener*. 118.

⁴³²GBA Gerdener, “Die aanleiding en doel van die konferensie” In: *‘n Eeu van Sendingwerk, Sendingkonferensie, Bloemfontein 29 September – 3 Oktober 1938*. (Kaapstad: SA Bybelvereniging, 1938), 3.

⁴³³GBA Gerdener, *‘n Eeu van genade 1838-1938*, (Kaapstad: SA Bybelvereniging, 1938), 22.

⁴³⁴Bosch, *Witness to the world*, 42.

Christians were called to preach the gospel to the helpless heathendom, not because they were so bad but rather because of God's call. In so doing, he steered clear of contextualising mission within the needs of humanity and ascribed it to the doing of God.⁴³⁵

These two theoretical foundations were, however, never intended to be the end but rather a means to an end. Out of this theory a pragmatic energy was to be inspired. "As the farmer seeks to better his harvest", explained Gerdener, "so too must the Church strive for higher heights and richer fruit... lessons from the past are measures which must benefit future growth".⁴³⁶ Although an academic, Gerdener warned against the tendency of these discussions to idly circle within the lofted confines of the study room.⁴³⁷ With this awareness and in an attempt to avoid the trap of academic debates, Gerdener's theorizing was always conducted with the intention of practical implementation. It was this third and pragmatic aspect of his missiology which would, as will become clear by the end of this study, provide the inspiration for Gerdener's answers to South Africa's racial questions during the mid-1900s.

During the 19th Century the American and British missionaries, Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn, popularized a 'three-selves' formula as the ultimate goal for mission work. The first phase being evangelization, the second referred to the planting of a mission church and the final phase being the independence of the young planted church. This missional formula was partly born out of a rise in denominational competition after the spirit of a united evangelical front began collapsing during the 1830s. As a result, the fundamental formula of collecting souls for the Kingdom found in Pietism, gave way to one more focused on the organisational structures, as in the practices and doctrines, of specific denominations.⁴³⁸ Gerdener fell predominantly in line with this tradition and contended that individual conversion could no longer be regarded as the end of the church's task, but that the dealings of the community as a whole were also to be brought under the influence of the Gospel.⁴³⁹ By this he meant that the planting of young mission churches was only the second step in the process toward the final goal of independence. "Experience teaches that the conversion of souls must be followed by the establishment of congregations, and eventually of organized churches... it is still not enough if the post-heathen congregations organize into a Church. That Church must develop to gradually become independent".⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁵van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener*, 75.

⁴³⁶GBA Gerdener, "Wagter, hoe ver is die nag". In: Wellington yearbook 1937.

⁴³⁷Minutes of the Stellenbosch study circle, Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, 15 June 1943. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV 226].

⁴³⁸Bosch, *Witness to the world*, 153.

⁴³⁹GBA Gerdener, *Recent developments in the South African mission field*. (Cape Town: N.G. Kerk-uitgewers, 1958), 12.

⁴⁴⁰Gerdener, *Reguikoersgehou*, 87.

Gerdener's missiology, as well as that of a DRC majority, was further influenced by the ethnic emphasis found in German missiology of the time. These influences were voiced through missiologists such as Gustav Warneck, Bruno Gutmann and Siegfried Knak. The latter, with his premise that racial and national differences were God-ordained, notably influenced the missiologist J.G. Strydom, who was himself instrumental in the formulation of the 1931 Free State mission policy.⁴⁴¹ Gerdener's theories echoed remnants of these German missiologists, especially those of Warneck, who held that the ultimate task of mission was the Christianisation of entire peoples. Using the term *Volkschristianisierung*, Warneck moved for indigenous churches to be planted within the heart of the newly encountered nation, not to Europeanize but rather to be rooted within the unique cultural and national essence of the indigenous people. This indigenous church was then to be paternally nurtured by a white governing church until reaching the ideal of independence and self-governance.⁴⁴² Gerdener was a proponent of this indigenous character of mission work and argued that mission was to enhance national pride rather than destroy it, "it must be kept in focus that Evangelization does not presume denationalization. Christianity must not rid the native of his language and culture, but must ultimately strengthen and purify his nationalism".⁴⁴³ This instilled two critical features in Gerdener's missiological rationale; one being the support for racially and culturally distinctive churches and the second being the eventual autonomy of these separate indigenous churches.

Considering the relation between Christianity and culture, Gerdener described the Christian message as one characterized by fluidity. Thanks to this attribute it had the ability to take root in cultures from all over the world. It was by virtue of this understanding that he considered Christianity the final and universal religion. This fluidity, however, brought with it a certain tension. On the one hand the Christian message was not to clog the cultural arteries of a people, while on the other hand the integrity of the message itself was to be upheld. By way of walking this tightrope, Gerdener placed a restriction on the relationship between the Christian message and the unique nationalities of the world. Cultural assimilation was to be done strictly through careful and selective consideration and the ethno-national element was always to be understood in light of the overshadowing Christian authority. "Added to this, on the other hand, is that the Christian faith is also supranational and that any tendency of national self-worship must be warned and acted against".⁴⁴⁴ As a rule Gerdener put forth a two-stage

⁴⁴¹van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener*, 93.

⁴⁴²Kadorf, *Gustav Warneck: Hist life and labor*, 282.

⁴⁴³Gerdener, *Reguit koers gehou*, 88.

⁴⁴⁴Gerdener, *Die Afrikaner en die sending*, 94.

strategy which acted as an advisory tool for the manner in which the Gospel was to be imparted and adapted within the new receiving nation. Firstly, the dichotomy between old religious beliefs and the new Gospel truth needed to be made clear to the heathen audience, before any attempt at positive enculturation could be considered. “It is only when certain followers of the non-Christian religions have made a decision to break with the old and enter the new, that the two can sit down together to create a truly Native Church... whose forms and functions are rooted in Native life, background and environment”.⁴⁴⁵ With this Gerdener sought to protect the integrity of the Christian message against the threat of dilution, “[the message] must always be revolutionary; it cannot be faithfully brought or loyally accepted without a real break with the past”.⁴⁴⁶ Only once these beacons were firmly in place could, “volk’s habits [of the non-Christian people]... not be condemned, but rather protected and honoured, through the influence of Christianity”.⁴⁴⁷ Further, natural growth of these young mission churches could be stimulated in which they would not, “be dictated from the outside or from above, but will grow from within and from below... rooted in their own soil”.⁴⁴⁸ Going further than most DRC ministers of the time, Gerdener cherished this assimilatory element to Christianity and argued that, when properly understood and purified, the incorporation of indigenous languages, history, music and cultural practices could strengthen the national character of mission churches and in so doing increase its efficiency and contribution to the wider universal church.⁴⁴⁹

Racially separated churches in South Africa were, in the first instance, based along historical and traditional lines, as opposed to theological ones. The DRC’s 1881 decision to group its mission work amongst coloured people into one church, *The Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa*, was largely a product of this separatist tradition, and was formally fostered by the 1857 Synod decision.⁴⁵⁰ At first glance, establishing this independent mission church would seem consistent with the above-mentioned ideals of a curated self-governing and independent young church. However, this was a false independence. The mother DRC held all the cards as it maintained financial responsibility over the young churches and had veto power regarding any decisions made by the Mission Synod. Furthermore, the leaders of the black congregations were still all white.⁴⁵¹ This reflects the paternalistic trends prevalent in the 19th Century DRC; a trend which Gerdener wholeheartedly ascribed to. Consistent with the

⁴⁴⁵GBA Gerdener, *Recent developments in the South African mission field*. (Cape Town: N.G. Kerk-uitgewers, 1958), 12.

⁴⁴⁶Gerdener, *Recent developments in the South African mission field*, 13.

⁴⁴⁷Gerdener, *Reguit koers gehou*, 88.

⁴⁴⁸Gerdener, *Recent developments in the South African mission field*, 13.

⁴⁴⁹Op Die Horison, No. 2, 1944.

⁴⁵⁰Gerdener, *Reguit koers gehou*, 38.

⁴⁵¹Elphick, *Equality of believers*, 34.

vocabulary of the day, Gerdener communicated the relationship between the white DRC and the mission church within the metaphorical confines of a parent-child relationship. Young churches were, as he explained, entirely dependent upon the mother church at birth, but over time they would be nurtured and led by the mother church into self-governing, self-propagating and self-supporting churches, as the ‘missionary force’ gave way to a ‘church entity’.⁴⁵² He advocated the principle of Christian guardianship and from here argued that it was the divine vocation of the white population to show the way for the gradual development of the Coloured and African population and that along these lines, “all unnecessary friction and clashing would be avoided and each would be afforded space to develop along their own nature and desire”.⁴⁵³ This process of gradual development was a delicate one and Gerdener, continuing with the organic family metaphor, defined each daughter church as having a certain unique character or personality which determined the pace at which independence was reached: “churches grow and become autonomous according to inherent laws of growth and development”.⁴⁵⁴ Notably, this idea of gradual development under white guardianship was one not restricted to the white population. In 1946, Gerdener published an article in *Op Die Horison* written by an African evangelist, S.G. Sekano Ntoane, in which he dealt with the question of whether or not African mission churches were ready for independence. Writing in Afrikaans, Ntoane pointed out the dangers of unrestrained independence and rallied behind the necessity of sympathetic guardianship: “the parents must see to it that the norms, by which reckoning is made, are met”.⁴⁵⁵ In his closing argument, Ntoane concluded that, when carefully considering the points of self-government, self-support and self-expansion and all that went with them, the African church was not yet ripe for independence, “we are still in the becoming phase”.⁴⁵⁶

Nonetheless, by the start of the 1940s, Gerdener was repeatedly asserting that the DRC’s mission church had reached the third and final phase of the missional task and urged the white DRC to embrace the unknown and awkward process of handing over authority to indigenous hands.⁴⁵⁷ At a missionary conference in 1951, Gerdener discussed the complexities coupled with this handing over process, and the unique character of each daughter church, as he struggled to find any fixed missiological points upon which to gauge the aptitude for independence of mission churches. He noted a further problem which complicated the matter, namely the reluctance of the mother church to give up its authority over the mission church.

⁴⁵²Gerdener, *Recent developments in the South African mission field*, 147.

⁴⁵³Gerdener, *Regui koers gehou*, 118.

⁴⁵⁴Gerdener, *Recent developments in the South African mission field*, 147.

⁴⁵⁵*Op Die Horison*, March 1946, No. 1, 20.

⁴⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁵⁷*Op Die Horison*, March 1940, No. 1.

“There is a danger that the Mother church, through its participation in the missional action front, considers its missionaries as indispensable. The result of this is that the daughter church accepts responsibility at a restrained pace and that independence is withheld from them.”⁴⁵⁸ Gerdener warned of the fatal damage caused to the mission church by the egotistic protection of superiority on the part of Western missionaries: “nothing is worse than freezing the sense of responsibility in the emerging church leader through the thought that he is not fully expected to take leadership”.⁴⁵⁹ In this, Gerdener referred to the unique mission problem faced by the DRC in South Africa, as opposed to other missionary societies. Where foreign societies had no choice but to let go of their work, the DRC found itself based in the same country as its mission work and consequently the line between control and cooperation was far more blurred.⁴⁶⁰ To combat an egotistically driven relationship between the DRC and the mission churches, Gerdener repeatedly spoke out against any inflated ideas which the DRC may have embedded in their culture: “it cannot be denied that our church runs the danger of having too much authority and for too long over its mission work and because of this it hinders the healthy development of the mission work.”⁴⁶¹ He continued to argue that, when considering a native church’s quest for independence, that it should not be held to the standard of white churches, but rather to the standard of their own indigenous context and surroundings. Therefore, he contended that in the natural take-over process by the younger church it was to be anticipated that, “where the leadership is being transferred, a decline of the ethical and spiritual standards may be expected”.⁴⁶² Gerdener did not see this as a negative phenomenon however, but rather a logical occurrence in the process towards maturity and typically placed his faith not on the mission church’s ability to lead, but rather in God’s ability to take control and inspire the native church; in this emphasizing the so-called civilizing power of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁶³

Gerdener invested a considerable amount of energy in campaigning for the greater independence of the mission church. A critical step on this road to independence centred largely around leadership: “as long as a white man stands as head, there can be no talks of becoming independent... we cannot just take away the leadership of the white, if we have not yet developed a well prepared native leadership.”⁴⁶⁴ A by-products of the coloured church’s ‘independence’ in 1881, was the fostering of an increased appetite for trained leaders coming

⁴⁵⁸GBA Gerdener, “Die toesig van die moederkerke oor die ontwikkelende sendingkerke”. In: *Die kweking van selfstandige inheemse Kerke*. (Bloemfontein, N.G. Sendingspers, 1951), 35.

⁴⁵⁹Op Die Horison, 1942, No. 2.

⁴⁶⁰Gerdener, “Die toesig van die moederkerke oor die ontwikkelende sendingkerke”, 36.

⁴⁶¹Op Die Horison, 1942, No. 2.

⁴⁶²Gerdener, *Recent developments in the South African mission field*, 13.

⁴⁶³Op Die Horison, 1940, No. 1.

⁴⁶⁴Ibid.

out of the mission church itself.⁴⁶⁵ Gerdener supported this appetite and argued that home-grown leadership was the natural and necessary next step for the mission church and that without it, these young congregations would be rendered voiceless.⁴⁶⁶ In this regard, Gerdener was significantly progressive and played a central role in the laying out of the road map for the training of coloured ministers. The training of native ministers within the DRC is a topic which merits its own independent study, and due to the limited scope of this research, an in-depth investigation into this complex history is not possible. It will, however, serve to briefly delve into the topic with specific reference to the role Gerdener played in it.

Already by 1913 Gerdener wrote a letter to A.C. Murray, a former missionary in Malawi and the General Mission Secretary at the time, informing him of the fact that there were still no facilities of which to speak of for the purpose of training coloured evangelists. He emphasized the need which existed within the missional world and that he had already been communicating with the superintendent of the Moravian society, R. Marx, in this regard.⁴⁶⁷ Later in his correspondence with Murray, he suggested that the DRC make a start in the training of coloured evangelists and that this be conducted in collaboration with the three German mission societies. He was frustrated by the DRC's sluggish attitude towards native leadership and by the fact that the DRC lagged far behind the rest of the missionary world in the development of indigenous leaders. Gerdener protested that the time had come for the DRC to progress in preparing coloured congregants for leadership. "I believe that there is merit in the cause to begin a small school".⁴⁶⁸ In 1915 the DRC Synod took note of this and relayed the question to the General Mission Commission for further consideration. A sub-commission was subsequently selected and tasked with investigating the matter, with a specific focus on the temporal, spiritual and psychological situation of the coloureds. Due largely to his initiative in bringing the matter forward, Gerdener's name was specifically mentioned by the Mission Commission: "the name of Ds. Gerdener is added to the sub-commission of the Domestic Mission Commission for the execution of its decision".⁴⁶⁹ At the DRC Synod of 1916 the sub-commission presented its findings and in the report it stipulated six requirements which prospective evangelists needed to meet, among them was the ability to comfortably read and write, a reference testifying to the applicants' pure and acceptable lifestyle and membership to the DRC or any affiliated church group. It further specified the five subjects which were to be

⁴⁶⁵Chris JA Loff, "die teologiese skool vir die Nerderduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk in Suid-Afrika". In: *Teologie Stellenbosch* 150+, 128.

⁴⁶⁶Op Die Horison, 1942, No. 4.

⁴⁶⁷Letter to A.C. Murray, 9 December 1913. [DRC Archives in SA, KS610].

⁴⁶⁸Letter to A.C. Murray, 22 June 1914. [DRC Archives in SA, KS 610].

⁴⁶⁹DRC Synod meeting minutes, [DRC Archives in SA, KS 611].

presented in the syllabus. The demarcating of which bore the stamp of Gerdener's involvement as two of the five subjects were concerned with history.⁴⁷⁰

Two days before the Mission Synod of 1916 the select commission, of which Gerdener was still a member, met with ministers from the mission church on five key points. A discussion which was reported on at the Synod and which proved instrumental in establishing a formal training structure for coloureds as defined by one of the agenda points: "the establishment of an academy for the training of evangelists, which can eventually develop into an institution for the training of ministers for the mission church."⁴⁷¹ In its corresponding report delivered to the Synod, the sub-commission declared that it considered the time ripe for training coloured evangelists. As a result of this resolution, D.S. Botha, A.C. Murray and Gerdener were selected as part of a management committee responsible for oversight of the project.⁴⁷² This proved successful as by the following year, the first class of six pupils began their two-year course in the consistory of the mission DRC in Wellington, under the management of the local missionary, J.P. de Villiers.⁴⁷³ Although Gerdener only served on the above-mentioned management commission for a few months, he remained indirectly involved and invested in the endeavour for many years to come. It was due to Gerdener's influence, through another letter to A.C. Murray, that in 1917 J.S. Louw was asked to help de Villiers with the immense workload that came with the training of candidate evangelists coupled with the general requirements of being the mission minister. Gerdener feared that a lack in teaching resources would cause a stumbling block in the training of coloured evangelists, which was still in its delicate infancy. This was clearly a pet project for Gerdener and one which he sought to see thrive: "I now have nothing directly to do with the matter, however I naturally want to see the endeavour continue".⁴⁷⁴ Additionally, Gerdener would be asked to teach certain classes to the pupils as a special lecturer, and one of his books were used as a syllabus textbook in the 1940s.⁴⁷⁵

By the 1920s, the white DRC faced a rising and serious wish within the coloured community, for their congregations to be ministered by one of their own. Coloured evangelists were not enough, and the mounting call was for fully equipped coloured ministers. This was a reality which needed to be dealt with and was a natural consequence of the DRC's own model of separate independent churches. The yearning within the coloured community was further

⁴⁷⁰DRC Synod meeting minutes, [DRC Archives in SA, KS 611].

⁴⁷¹Minutes of the management of the Theological School in Wellington 1954-1962. [DRC Archives in SA, VGK-Sin 463].

⁴⁷²Minutes of the Commission for the training of coloured evangelists. [DRC Archives in SA, VGK-Sin 302].

⁴⁷³"Die Teologiese Skool, Wellington vir die Ned. Geref. Sendingkerk", 1956. [DRC Archives in SA, B1844].

⁴⁷⁴Letter to A.C. Murray, 18 January 1917. [DRC Archives in SA, KS610].

⁴⁷⁵Minutes of the management of the Theological School in Wellington 1954-1962. [DRC Archives in SA, VGK-Sin 463].

coupled with the ambition to be trained by their own church, the DRC, and not by a foreign organisation. This was epitomized when, in 1939, a coloured congregant and evangelist, Izak Morkel, refused to be trained by the Congregational church and demanded a qualification under a DRC banner. As a result he was permitted to the DRC institution for African evangelists, the Stofberg Gedenkskool, under special circumstances.⁴⁷⁶ J.M.N. Breedt vocalised this coloured ambition in a 1922 edition of *De Zendingbode*, a Dutch organ for the Mission church: “This is the task which now rests on our Church. Our coloured population, and namely our mission congregants, are starting to get the urge to elevate and work amongst their own volk. This is one good sign of life and development”.⁴⁷⁷

The question then arose as to the way in which the church was to go about this task of training coloured ministers. Due to the limited resources of the church, a deputation consisting of four members was sent to the Stofberg Gedenkskool in 1923, an institution already training African ministers and evangelists since 1908.⁴⁷⁸ The deputation was to investigate the possibility of having coloured ministers trained alongside the Africans, as the facility and resources were readily available. The deputation returned with a strong recommendation to reject the combined training of coloured and African ministers. They argued that the two should be held well apart as they were culturally incompatible.⁴⁷⁹ In a subsequent *Zendingbode* article, Breedt supported the separation of African and coloured trainees, arguing from within the tradition of ethnic distinction that, “it is necessary that such an institution should be rooted in the heart of a volk, and that the volk be rooted in the heart of the institution”.⁴⁸⁰ Gerdener would have agreed with Breedt in that the African’s Institution in the Free State was incompatible with the unique character and context of the Cape Coloured people; the two were different and needed to be trained as such. As a result it was decided in the Mission Synod of 1924, that structures for the training of coloured ministers would be implemented and that the institution would be kept separate: “this meeting gives notice that the time has dawned for the coloured man to be trained as ministers of the mission church... the meeting expresses further, as its wish, that the training-school be established in Wellington”.⁴⁸¹ Consequently, the rocky process of training coloured ministers began in 1930 in Wellington. No building was yet available, and classes were still conducted in the mission church. The ever optimistic Gerdener, however, encouraged the parties concerned: “let us not wait until a beautiful building is erected

⁴⁷⁶Letter by J. Rabie, 30 December, 1939. [DRC Archives in SA, KS611].

⁴⁷⁷J.M.N. Breedt, “De Opleiding van Kleurling Leeraars, Is het ons Ernst?” In: *De Zendingbode*, 15 November 1922. [DRC Archives in SA, KS 611].

⁴⁷⁸Dreyer, *Historich Album*, 184.

⁴⁷⁹C.J. Kriel, *Seuns in sy wingerd: Die Teologiese skool vir die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk in Suid-Afrika*, (Paarl: Paarl Druipers, 1979), 23.

⁴⁸⁰J.M.N. Breedt, “Wat omtrent Stofberg Gedenkskool”, In: *De Zendingbode*, 15 November 1922. [DRC Archives in SA, KS 611].

⁴⁸¹Minutes of the management of the Theological School in Wellington 1954-1962. [DRC Archives in SA, VGK-Sin 463].

somewhere before we commence with this immensely important endeavour”.⁴⁸² The inconsistent and sporadic theological training for prospective coloured ministers continued for 24 years, until a formal institution, the *Teologiese Skool vir die N.G. Sendingkerk*, was inaugurated in Wellington in April 1954.⁴⁸³ Still the question around the DRC’s sincerity with regards to training coloured ministers remained. When in 1950, J.M.N. Breedt was offered the position of head of the institution, he asked, “is it the church’s sincere intention that the [coloured] institute be taken seriously, and that coloured ministers will gradually take the place of white missionary ministers; in other words that the coloured will eventually serve their own church?”, to which the church provided a reserved and cautious answer, “there is, and will be practical snags for many years, but the church is sincere with its efforts in the institution and its work, which has become a necessity”.⁴⁸⁴ J.M.N. Breedt eventually accepted the position and the responsibility of lecturing was divided between himself, G.S. Moller and the lecturers of the white Mission Institute.⁴⁸⁵

Gerdener, therefore, had an influential role to play in the eventual formal training of coloured ministers for the DRC. He considered the substitution of white ministers with indigenous leaders as the hallmark of a healthy missiology. This served his overriding ideal for the complete independence of the mission church, marked by leadership derived from within the community itself and ministered through liturgy seeped in the cultural blood of the indigenous people. As with the Afrikaner language movement, Gerdener placed great importance on the role of language in the development of a nation’s self-awareness and to its vital contribution in the inculcation of the Christian message within the heart of a nation. To this end he emphasized the need for mother tongue translations of the Bible and Christian literature. The need for written Christian material was further described as being especially important for primitive people as opposed to more developed societies: “in the realm of the primitive peoples, the way must be opened for the printed word. The language itself must be reduced to writing, the connotation of available words must be adapted and purified, and where necessary words for new Spiritual concepts and values do not exist, they must be found”.⁴⁸⁶ This was, according to Gerdener, a critical part to the development of young churches toward self-expression and self-support: “stability in religious and ecclesiastical life depends largely on the ability to read and study the Word of God and other edifying material”.⁴⁸⁷ In short,

⁴⁸²Op Die Horison, 1942, No. 3.

⁴⁸³ “Die Teologiese Skool, Wellington vir die Ned. Geref. Sendingkerk”, 1956. [DRC Archives in SA, B1844].

⁴⁸⁴Meeting minutes of the Curatorium of the Theological School in Wellington, 24 November 1950. [DRC Archives in SA, VGK-Sin 463].

⁴⁸⁵Minutes of the management of the Theological School in Wellington 1954-1962. [DRC Archives in SA, VGK-Sin 463].

⁴⁸⁶Gerdener, *Recent developments in the South African mission field*, 224.

⁴⁸⁷Ibid.

Gerdener held the training of indigenous ministers and the indigenization of the church's liturgy as two immovable pillars in the foundation of a truly independent mission church.

The training of white missionaries also faced several struggles. Question marks hung over the longevity of the Wellington Mission Institute during the time of Gerdener's lectureship; questions which centred on the manner in which missionaries were to be trained, their status and whether or not the Institute was justified. Already in the year prior to Gerdener's arrival, the DRC Synod initiated an investigation into the possibility of amalgamating the training of missionaries with the Theological Seminary in Stellenbosch, upon a suggestion from A.F. Louw.⁴⁸⁸ With this in mind, Gerdener embarked on a study tour to the USA, Canada and Europe at the end of 1934 with the help of a Carnegie bursary, with the objective of gathering greater insight into the training of missionaries.⁴⁸⁹ This highlighted another characteristic of Gerdener, one which would regularly surface in the years to come, especially when dealing with the complexities of racial questions, that of exposing oneself to alternative thoughts. "If I and my volk do not compare ourselves to others, I live in the all too comfortable illusion that there is none like me".⁴⁹⁰ Gerdener departed in October and true to his diligent character, had every detail of his travels well mapped and planned so as to ensure an efficient endeavour: "aimless pleasure rides and diddling around seldom bring impressions of lasting value".⁴⁹¹ Amongst the several institutions and mission experts he visited during these travels, Gerdener was most impressed by the training models found in Germany, and particularly the Hervormde church's mission school in Oegstgeest, Netherlands. What these models upheld were separate, independent and specialized training for missionaries. The syllabus for candidate missionaries was not simply watered-down training in medicine and social work or merely shortened courses adapted from the Theological Seminary, but rather a syllabus completely curated for the specific needs of mission work.⁴⁹² Upon his return, Gerdener published his findings on missionary training in a report which carried immense influence in the renewed discourse on missionary status. The report re-kindled the old question within the DRC and initiated a six-month long correspondence in the *Kerkbode* on the topic of missionary status, between 1935 and 1940.⁴⁹³ During his travels overseas, Gerdener was further awakened to the fact that the standard of missionary training in South Africa lagged behind the rest of the world and that its elevation was also the solution to the pressing status dilemma.

⁴⁸⁸Wellington Mission Institute yearbook 1958. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydskrifte Sending-Instituut Wellington], 14.

⁴⁸⁹van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener*, 142.

⁴⁹⁰Wellington yearbook, 1935. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydskrifte Sending-Instituut Wellington]

⁴⁹¹*Ibid.*

⁴⁹²van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener*, 143.

⁴⁹³Rapport van die kommissie insake die status en besoldiging van sendelinge, Federal Mission Council meeting minute, March 1944. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV 226].

The differentiated status of missionaries was already instituted by the first DRC Synod in 1824 as means of recognizing the efforts of its members in mission work, which the DRC itself was beginning to become more active in.⁴⁹⁴ Two important reasons for the origin of this distinction should be mentioned here. The first was based not on the missionaries themselves but rather on the social standing of their flock. DRC ministers were trained to serve the European population whereas missionaries were sent out to serve the lower socially tiered native heathens. The other reason rested on education. DRC ministers were trained along normative lines based in the Netherlands, whereas missionaries received sporadic training.⁴⁹⁵ During the 1930s the lesser status of missionaries was being challenged and by 1942 the matter already received attention within the DRC, with its own demarcated sub-commission within Gerdener's newly formed mission council.⁴⁹⁶ Fourteen years later, with the status issue still pressing, the secretary of a missionary society, B.J. Odendaal, voiced the issue of the status in relation to the Christian church in no uncertain terms: "a double status and titling bears unending damage for the expansion of God's Kingdom in both the Mother, as well the Mission Church, because the missionary carries a stigma of inferiority and therefore cannot fulfil his divinely ordained task".⁴⁹⁷

Gerdener was frustrated by the reality of the lower status of missionaries and agreed with the statement made by Odendaal when he lamented the fact that, due to this traditional "conception of the inferiority of mission training... the entire mission task is damaged".⁴⁹⁸ Gerdener continuously lobbied for an increased standard of training in the Institute as a solution to the problem. He petitioned for the addition of a fourth year as well as an extra lecturer to the missional training structure, and argued that it was unrealistic to expect an equivalent level of training when the four-year course given by four professors at the Seminary was presented by three lecturers over three years in Wellington.⁴⁹⁹ During the early 1940s Gerdener and his fellow FMC members threw their weight behind this appeal for an elevated academic standard and lobbied for the same thorough preparation to be given to the missionary as enjoyed by prospective ministers for the fulfilment of their duties. They justified this by referring to the demanding task faced by missionaries; one being the continuing development of coloureds and Africans.⁵⁰⁰ At a conference of missionaries in 1948 C.H. Badenhorst, a later mission secretary,

⁴⁹⁴Dreyer, *Kruisgesante in Suid-Afrika: Jubileum-Gedenkboek van die Sendinginstituut op Wellington*, 1.

⁴⁹⁵David P Botha, "Die beginjare". In: *Teologie Stellenbosch 150+*, 122.

⁴⁹⁶Rapport van die kommissie insake die status en besoldiging van sendelinge, Federal Mission Council meeting minute, March 1944. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV 226].

⁴⁹⁷Letter from BJ Odendaal to CH Badenhorst, 29 July 1956. [DRC Archives in SA, KS470].

⁴⁹⁸Op Die Horison, December 1945, No. 4.

⁴⁹⁹Op Die Horison, December 1945, No. 4.

⁵⁰⁰Rapport van die kommissie insake die status en besoldiging van sendelinge, Federal Mission Council meeting minute, March 1944. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV 226].

described the absurdity of this depreciated status of missionaries and stressed the importance which specialized missionary training carried for the durability of the ecclesiastical task: “mission work is no inferior task, and therefore it demands extensive training, which will attract young men... the time where a young man, instead of driving 35 miles further to Stellenbosch and to study for an extra year, has to walk into the cul de sac brought about by attending the Mission Institute are over”.⁵⁰¹

In 1945 the status of the Institute was elevated when its lecturers were given the same title as those of the Seminary; that of professor.⁵⁰² Gerdener expressed reserved elation at the news as the sluggish pace at which this was realized was cause for disdain: “they simply received the name to which they have had the right to for years”.⁵⁰³ Further, Gerdener’s pleas for a fourth lecturer were heeded in 1950 with the addition of C.H. Badenhorst. Gerdener saw this as a giant leap forward in the Institute’s pursuit for independence alongside the Seminary and predicted that it would not be long before a fourth academic year was added to the course, which came about four years later. He also imagined that the admission of Badenhorst would have a positive impact on how the Institute was perceived: “it will be of no surprise if select Seminary students, who are called to the mission field, issue requests to endure a stint in the Institute after the completion of their four-year Seminary course”.⁵⁰⁴ Consequently, Gerdener believed missionary training to be a particular endeavour all on its own and in a 1944 FMC meeting he made this position clear. In a report on missionary status, which was delivered to the Synod, the meeting requested that the DRC make better provision for Seminary or university graduates who made themselves available for mission work, to undergo the added and necessary training. Gerdener insisted that the word ‘special’ be inserted as an adjective, in order to better describe what was meant by this training.⁵⁰⁵ This points to Gerdener’s vision for the Institute; an institution in its own right, focused on specialized missional training and considered on par with the Theological Seminary, with the two institutions fulfilling different yet distinctive roles within the theological and ecclesiastical world.

Gerdener was not on board with the popular suggestion of closing the Institute, which would mean moving the training of missionaries to the theological faculties of Stellenbosch and Pretoria. He, along with others, justified the continued existence of the Institute in that it was fulfilling a Godly calling towards the millions of heathens and went further by emphasising the fact that, by 1937 over 200 well-equipped missionaries from Wellington had been sent into

⁵⁰¹C.H. Badenhorst, *Openingsrede Sendelingskonferensie Johannesburg*. 16 March 1948. [DRC Archives in SA, VGK-Sin 568].

⁵⁰²Wellington Mission Institute yearbook, 1952. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydskrifte Sending-Instituut Wellington], 7.

⁵⁰³Op Die Horison, December 1945, No. 4.

⁵⁰⁴Op Die Horison, September 1950, No. 3.

⁵⁰⁵Federal Mission Council Meeting, 11 March 1944. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV 226].

the field.⁵⁰⁶ He further fought for the continuation of missionary training by focusing on widening financial reserves for prospective mission students and suggested to the Synod “that congregations take out study shares for mission students”.⁵⁰⁷ Gerdener’s investment in the continuity of the Institute was based on the fact that he saw no biblical support for the existence of a secondary status for missionaries. All who worked as servants of the Word, be they from the mother or mission church, were to be considered equal in status. In its 1944 report the FMC resolved that the minister of the mission church and the minister of the mother church were to cooperate and that both were seen as equal servants of the Word, however with different roles to fulfil. The mother church minister was focused on serving the needs of the internal white congregation, whereas the missionary was responsible for the needs of the coloured and black congregations and with the spreading of the Gospel.⁵⁰⁸ Gerdener feared that amalgamation with the Theological Seminaries would place the specialized and tailored training of missionaries under threat.

This vision which Gerdener nurtured for the Institute was, similar to his vision for separate coloured territories in the years to come, an idealistic one far removed from reality. The lack of resources and funding simply did not allow for these two institutions to run on parallel levels. By the 1950s Gerdener realized he was fighting a losing battle, as the DRC Synod became convinced that the solution to the status issue was the doing away of the Institute.⁵⁰⁹ In 1956 a questionnaire was sent out to all the DRC missionaries by the board of the Mission Institute asking their opinion regarding the status debacle. The data revealed the seriousness of the matter as over 90% of the respondents voted for missionaries to be given the equal title of ‘Dominee’ rather than ‘Eerwaarde’, that missionaries be given their status by the DRC rather than the mission church, that there be equal remuneration and that missional training be conducted solely by the Stellenbosch and Pretoria Seminaries.⁵¹⁰ This settled the future of the Institute and, despite Gerdener’s protest as chairman of the Cape General Mission Commission, the Synod of 1957 took the decision to close the doors for the training of white missionaries in Wellington, “and in the future all servants of the gospel will be trained in Stellenbosch”.⁵¹¹ The closing of the Institute took place in 1962, after the final students had completed their course. The ceremony took place in the Wellington-North Church and Gerdener was asked to deliver the closing speech.⁵¹²

⁵⁰⁶Wellington Mission Institute yearbook, 1937. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydskrifte Sending-Instituut].

⁵⁰⁷Federal Mission Council Meeting, 11 March 1944. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV 226].

⁵⁰⁸Rapport van die kommissie insake die status en besoldiging van sendelinge, Federal Mission Council meeting minute, March 1944. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV 226].

⁵⁰⁹Botha, *Die beginjare*, 124.

⁵¹⁰Questionnaire given out by the Curatorium of the Institute, 23 July 1956. [DRC Archives in SA, KS470].

⁵¹¹Wellington Mission Institute yearbook 1958. [DRC Archives in SA, Tydskrifte Sending-Instituut Wellington], 17.

⁵¹²Moedergemeente Wellington, Feesbrojsure. 1840-1965. [DRC Archives in SA, G780 Moed].

In 1937, in the midst of this status struggle, Gerdener accepted a call to Stellenbosch as professor of New Testament, along with other practical subjects, in the place of D.G. Malan.⁵¹³ In his few short years in Wellington, Gerdener did not fail to leave his mark on the local community. Upon his departure he received a letter from the local CSV branch, in which he served as chairman during his Wellington stint, thanking him for being the ‘powerful figure’ which he was and for his balanced and tactful leadership.⁵¹⁴ Although Gerdener was now no longer officially part of the Mission Institute, he remained committed to the elevation of its academic standards and supportive of the need for specialization in the field of mission.⁵¹⁵ Missiology, which fell under the broader department of Practical Theology, was one of the modules taught by Gerdener. However, it was clear that mission was the subject of the majority of his lectures, reflecting his belief that missiology was not simply a subject of theology, but rather that it was its very core.⁵¹⁶ Gerdener also used his position on the *Teologiese Studente Sending Vereniging*, a society which included the theological professors, to light the missional flame amongst students and to try to recreate the warm atmosphere of Wellington’s Samuel hostel. Apart from getting students involved in DRC mission endeavours, the society also lent substantial support to the mission institution of Wellington, the training of coloured ministers and the Stofberg Gedenkskool.⁵¹⁷ A lasting result of Gerdener’s efforts regarding missiological training came from his inputs during the Synod of 1957. He, together with the Cape General Mission Secretary J.G. Olivier, insisted that mission be seen as a specialized field and that it be given its due right. It was largely due to this influence that, in 1958, missiology received its own academic seat at the Stellenbosch Seminary with W.J. van der Merwe, Gerdener’s successor, as its first full-time lecturer.⁵¹⁸ Gerdener also requested that refresher courses be made available to missionaries who had returned home from the mission field. Due to the isolation faced by missionaries in the field Gerdener felt that they required spiritual refreshment, mental sharpening, contact with the mother church and its intentions and the sharing of ideas. “A space where we can be exposed to the ideas and opinions of someone else, different to ours, and out of which we can learn.”⁵¹⁹ In September 1955 Gerdener gave public notice of his retirement as theological professor in Stellenbosch and in so doing ended his formal work in missional training. That being said, and in accordance with his character, Gerdener remained informally connected to the academic world and made contributions to the

⁵¹³Kerkbode, 23 August 1967, 261.

⁵¹⁴Letter from Wellington CSV members to Gerdener, 1937. [DRC Archives in SA, PPV 77].

⁵¹⁵Standpunt is sake moontlike amalgamasie van die sendinginstituut met die Kweekskool en die teologiese fakulteit, 1956. [DRC Archives in SA, KS470].

⁵¹⁶van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener*, 148.

⁵¹⁷Meeting minutes of the TSSV, 1936-1961. [DRC Archives in SA, K-Div 2684].

⁵¹⁸Ferreira, *Die Teologiese seminarium van Stellenbosch*, 77.

⁵¹⁹Op Die Horison, 1942, No. 1.

public discourse until his death. This was, for example, demonstrated when he agreed to become a life-long member of the South African Academy for Science and Art in 1956.⁵²⁰

The brewing of a policy

In 1929 the Free State DRC held a conference in Kroonstad on the so-called ‘native question’ which had two important repercussions. On a general level it signified an awareness within the DRC that the time had come for its missiological intentions and rationale to find a more comprehensive expression, while on a more personal level it brought a task into Gerdener’s life which would intimately involve him for at least two decades. This conference, organized and dominated by the Free State mission secretary J.G. Strydom, was tainted with an atmosphere of anxiety brought about by a rising national awareness amongst Africans. By the 20th century the mission work of the DRC and its principle of white trusteeship faced a challenge of its own making. A growing desire for independence was increasingly being felt by Africans who were by now mature members of mission congregations and who sought their own leadership positions promised them by the 19th Century missionaries. However, the only ecclesiastical options at their disposal were to either remain within the missional church or move to the more multi-racial, largely British, denominations. Both options, however, would mean remaining under a white paternalistic leadership. As a result of these simmering frustrations, largely provoked by the white church having made no actual room for black aspirations, many broke away and initiated independent black churches.⁵²¹ This pertinent black angst was furthermore not limited to ecclesiastical circles. There were underlying threats of unrest in the urban sectors as Clements Kadalie’s *Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union* began gathering up African forces to unite under the banner of a trade union.⁵²² Adding to the discontent were issues of land dispersal, which had been compounded since the implementation of the Natives Land Act of 1913, as well as the subsequent suppressive acts instituted by the white government. Resistance to racial oppression was encouraged by black leaders such as Sol Plaatje and John Dube through non-violent means such as defiance campaigns and peaceful protests.⁵²³

Strydom published the speeches delivered at the 1929 conference, and in its foreword his paranoia for white survival in relation to an unregulated black majority was blatant. Strydom

⁵²⁰Letter from SA Academy for science and art, 14 November 1956. [DRC Archives in SA, PPV73].

⁵²¹John de Gruchy, *The church struggle in South Africa*, (London: SCM Press, 2004), 40.

⁵²²Giliomee, the rise and demise of the Afrikaners, 42.

⁵²³Thias Kgatla and Anderson Magwira, “The Defining Moments for the Dutch Reformed Church Mission Policy of 1935 and 1947”. *Missionalia: Southern African journal of mission studies* Vol. 43(3) (2015): 368.

ascribed a leading role to the Afrikaner church and argued that the only hope for white survival was through the correct control of the black population at all levels of society and further agitated for complete segregation and differentiation. “The danger of black and white assimilation is removed through the correct evangelization and the correct education of the native. Through this each race generates self-respect and is bonded to his own nation”.⁵²⁴ In stark contrast to Gerdener’s missional motive, modelled upon Godly love, Strydom’s motive was one based entirely on the interest of white preservation, stimulated by a fear of white destruction at the hands of an African mass unregulated by Afrikaner authority.⁵²⁵ A minister from Bethlehem West, Jan Christoffel du Plessis, delivered a noteworthy paper at this conference, in which he raised themes which would prove to be immensely influential in the years to come. Du Plessis drew on the self-awareness which was now awakened amongst Africans and argued that the reason for African angst, and the resulting tension, was based on an insufficient mission policy as well as a general misunderstanding of the DRC’s racial intentions. A policy which would give direction to the DRC ideals, and which would give council to secular racial relations, was now of utmost importance. “We must be clearer in our intended ideals, and the presentation of a determinative policy which nurtures trust, is essential in the search for a general native policy, on political and other terrains”.⁵²⁶ The theme of a clear stipulation of DRC’s racial intentions was one which would, from that point on, dominate discussions regarding the mission policy. During his years of work on the expansion of the federal mission policy, Gerdener repeatedly emphasised the sincerity of the DRC policy and urged that these good intentions be clearly specified to the native and coloured people.⁵²⁷ To this end the policy was frequently translated into different languages, starting in 1937, and placed in English newspapers so as to generate positive publicity in support of this policy within the relevant circles.⁵²⁸ In his 1929 speech, du Plessis ascribed the Afrikaner’s racial attitude to the cultural aspect of their evangelism. In other words, the Afrikaner’s evangelism was coupled with a conservative approach intent on protecting racial identity. In explaining this concept du Plessis used the term ‘apartheid’ six years before it would find its way into the public political discourse, and argued that it was here that misunderstanding regarding the DRC’s racial segregation crept in: “an explanation for the spirit of *Apartheid*, which has

⁵²⁴Die N.G. Kerk in die O.V.S. en die naturelle vraagstuk. Conference of 1929. [DRC Archives in SA, B8362].

⁵²⁵Elphick, *Equality of believers*, 227.

⁵²⁶Die N.G. Kerk in die O.V.S. en die naturelle vraagstuk. Conference of 1929. [DRC Archives in SA, B8362].

⁵²⁷Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, 10 March 1944 [DRC Archives in SA, DIV 226].

⁵²⁸Meeting of the Uitvoerende Commission of the FMC, 24 September 1948 [DRC Archives in SA, 2436].

always typified our behaviour and which has led some of our members into misunderstanding, must be found in our fundamental conception of mission work and not in racial prejudice”.⁵²⁹

It was decided at this conference in the Free State that the time had come for a clearly formulated mission policy in which the church’s position and responsibility towards Africans be made clear. The resolution was handed over to the Free State mission commission, which in turn laid it before the relevant Synod in 1931. In the same year the Free State mission policy, in which J.C. du Plessis and J.G. Strydom had a heavy hand, was adopted.⁵³⁰ Although the Free State policy acknowledged the spiritual equality of all people in the eyes of God and affirmed the equal value of black souls to those of whites, it took a sharp and uncompromising stance against social equality.⁵³¹ It was able to justify this seemingly contradictory position by separating the spiritual from the temporal as two unrelated entities. The temporal needs of African people were subsidiary to their spiritual needs: “before there can ever be talks of the development of temporal interests in the native society, a purposeful spiritual life must first be planted”.⁵³² As a result the policy affirmed and promoted the principle of separate development as the future of South Africa. The supporting rationale stated that it would safeguard the African population from becoming mere prototypes of the whites and would promote the development of Africans along the lines of their innate racial characteristics.

This represented an important avenue of thought within the DRC, one which would carry influence in the years to come; equality, but not equal rights. To Jan du Plessis, the concept of equal rights and opportunities was one of relative significance in society. He contended that relations between groups of people were not based on equal rights, but rather on the right each one had to express themselves within their own cultural identity. “Even the relation between the Afrikaans and English-speaking populations is not based on equal rights, but on the right each one has to self-expression... founded on identity of national interest, civilization and social status within one and the same race”.⁵³³ Based on this logic, and by using language, customs and culture as determinants, the policy emphasized that blacks were to develop on their own terrain, separate and apart, which simultaneously supported the ideal of the white race being inherently chosen as the ruling race.⁵³⁴

At same time, rising awareness of African nationalism could be felt within the Cape DRC as well. In 1931, a Cape missionary, Johannes Reyneke, urged Cape missionaries to adopt a

⁵²⁹Die N.G. Kerk in die O.V.S. en die naturelle vraagstuk. Conference of 1929. [DRC Archives in SA, B8362].

⁵³⁰R.T.J. Lombard, *Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke en rassepolitiek: met spesiale verwysing na die jare 1948 – 1961*. (Silverton: Promedia-publikasies, 1981), 44.

⁵³¹Elphick, *Equality of believers*, 229.

⁵³²Die N.G. Kerk in die O.V.S. en die naturelle vraagstuk. Conference of 1929. [DRC Archives in SA, B8362].

⁵³³*Ibid.*

⁵³⁴Kgatla and Magwira, “The Defining Moments for the Dutch Reformed Church Mission Policy of 1935 and 1947”, 369.

policy of their own which would represent a more focused approach in their work amongst Cape Africans. As a result of this, the Cape Synod adopted an internal policy which, apart from the classic ‘three-self’ missional formula, bore little resemblance to the Free State policy and its dominant fear of social equalizing. Owing to its age-old missionary influences, the Cape policy had a far more evangelically missional focus as opposed to a political one, and was considerably vaguer on the topic of racial segregation.⁵³⁵ By 1933, the discussions which were initiated by the DRC Native Affairs Commission, with blacks and coloureds, required that a prevailing missiological consensus be found amongst all four DRCs. The commission advised that, before entering into any further inter-racial discussions, uniformity in the DRC’s position was needed through the means of a common mission policy.⁵³⁶ In 1934 a sub-commission, in which Johannes Reyneke played an influential role, was appointed by the Synod. Their task was to work together with the Native Affairs Commission, in which Gerdener was now a leading member, in formulating a federal DRC mission policy.⁵³⁷

In 1935, a concept policy was crafted, accepted by the DRC Federal Council and distributed to the four Synods for approval. It was a compromise between the Free State and Cape policies with the fundamental elements of the policy reflecting, and to a remarkable degree following, those of Gerdener’s own personal missiology. The policy rested in the first instance on the biblical objective found in the Great Commission and the evangelical implications which went hand-in-hand with this. The policy then affirmed the arrival of white Christian settlers into Africa as the chosen bearers of the Gospel and followed the argument of divine historical intervention. The Afrikaner’s role in Africa was further depicted in exclusive terms: “we consider, therefore, that it is the special privilege and responsibility of the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa – more than any other church or mission society – to bring the gospel to the heathens of this land”.⁵³⁸ Finally, the policy set out its missional ideals under six sub-headings, namely evangelical, mission fields, relation to other churches and societies, education, social and economic.⁵³⁹ Gerdener ascribed these six sub-headings to the inevitable consequences which were coupled with the evangelization process. “The announcement of the Gospel awakens ambitions and aspirations in the consciousness and heart of those who accept it.”⁵⁴⁰ In other words, the ideal of independent self-supporting and self-governing mission churches, established upon the indigenous bedrock, meant that the young church’s

⁵³⁵Elphick, *Equality of believers*, 230.

⁵³⁶Lombard, *Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke en rassepolitiek*, 45.

⁵³⁷Crafford, *Aan God die dank*, 464.

⁵³⁸Concept Mission Policy of the DRC drafted by the Native Affairs commission, 1935. [DRC Archives in SA, Sin 245].

⁵³⁹*Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁰Gerdener, *Reguit koers gehou*, 92.

development could not be prevented from reaching a stage where it would need to affirm its own unique Christian identity in all aspects of life. Upon this Gerdener justified the church's involvement in secular matters: "this unfortunately also means that where the mission task exerts itself on the economic, cultural, social and even political arenas of the mission community; the mission itself will consequently come into contact with the legislation and politics of the country".⁵⁴¹ The 1935 policy reflected this ideal and stated that native aspirations, which were clearly already bubbling to the surface, were not to be suppressed but rather advised and nudged towards the 'correct' direction in the spirit of trusteeship, and that their unique nationalism was to be supported.⁵⁴² This intended control of native development was especially related to education. The policy made it clear that native education was to be based on native culture, language, history and characteristics. Further, it stated the goal of native education to be, "that the native will be able to take in his designated position in his land and within his volk, which he will not be able to do if he is made into a mere white imitator".⁵⁴³ Regarding social equalizing, the policy took a clearer stance than the Cape policy, however one less blunt than that of the Free State.⁵⁴⁴ The church declared itself unequivocally against the idea of racial mixing and followed the tradition of 'equality, without equal rights' by stipulating that "each nation has the right to be itself and to develop and elevate itself. Where the church thus declares itself against social equality in the sense of disregarding race and colour difference between white and black in daily interaction, it wants to promote and encourage social differentiation as well as conscious or cultural segregation, to the benefit of both sections".⁵⁴⁵

At the core of the DRC mission policy was the principle of separate development and it was the first concrete legislative step taken by the Federal DRC in imposing its missional theories onto secular society. With this came its tradition of racial segregation, which can be traced back to the official decision of 1857, which influenced and informed the white governments' segregation policies, steered the racial feeling of the lay Afrikaner population and sought to dictate every facet of society with regards to black and white relations. To a large extent, this 1935 policy combined racial and missional theory and acted as the foundation for the DRC's mission agenda, directed its uniform position regarding racial relations and encapsulated the

⁵⁴¹Ibid., 93.

⁵⁴²Concept Mission Policy of the DRC drafted by the Native Affairs commission, 1935. [DRC Archives in SA, Sin 245].

⁵⁴³Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴Elphick, *Equality of believers*, 232.

⁵⁴⁵Concept Mission Policy of the DRC drafted by the Native Affairs commission, 1935. [DRC Archives in SA, Sin 245].

work of the FMC.⁵⁴⁶ This would also set the stage for the 1940s, arguably the start of Gerdener's greatest influence on wider society and societal structures.

⁵⁴⁶Gerdener, *Reguit koers gehou*, 92.

Chapter IV: *Years of public prestige (1940-1950)*

By the start of the 1940s most Afrikaners were well removed from any ties to their original European motherlands and recognized no homeland apart from South Africa.⁵⁴⁷ This implied a white minority claim of residency to a land consisting of a vast African majority. One faction within the Afrikaner nationalist intelligentsia built this case of occupancy predominantly on historical fundaments, by insisting that both black and white had reached the territorial confines of South Africa simultaneously and that out of this initial meeting the Voortrekker's policy of territorial segregation had grown.⁵⁴⁸ Although it was a position later easily dismissed by liberal historiography, Gerdener sympathized with this tradition and maintained that "the white and the Bantu were both colonizing invaders and entered the country at around the same time".⁵⁴⁹ He argued further that the racial conceptualization which framed all future Afrikaner philosophies, characterized by separation rather than integration and marked by a distain for social equalizing, took shape as soon as the Voortrekkers from the South met the native tribes of the North.⁵⁵⁰ In a brochure published in 1953, D.P. Laurie, the then FMC chairman, grappled with this idea in an attempt to defend the DRC mission policy and its principle of separate development. In this address he argued that, over the preceding two decades, Afrikaners were faced with a choice which carried determinative influence for their survival as a nation: "we were either to allow ourselves to be engulfed by the heathen non-whites around us, and as whites disappear from the scene, or we needed to make a plan to remain white".⁵⁵¹ Indubitably the latter was chosen.

The 1940s were also significant in that the idea of decolonialization had been sparked. The concept, coming from abroad, that South Africa was just another temporary colonial land for whites introduced the recurring theme of validation and justification into the public dialogue of the Afrikaners, as a deterrent to the feeling of alienation. Gerdener was a leading proponent in this effort to justify Afrikaner residency and was of the opinion that the notion of decolonialization, with regards to South African whites, was fanciful and that it could never be implemented. As a result, he stringently emphasized the Afrikaner's right of occupancy in South Africa and it was predominantly from this basis that he addressed all subsequent racial

⁵⁴⁷Gerdener, *Die Afrikaner en die sending*, 4.

⁵⁴⁸Giliomee, *The rise and demise of the Afrikaners*, 50.

⁵⁴⁹G.B.A. Gerdener "The crux of the racial situation in South Africa." In: *International Review of Mission* 38, no. 151 (1949): 280-94.

⁵⁵⁰Gerdener, *Die Afrikaner en die sending*, 84.

⁵⁵¹'n Brosjyre van die sendingwerksaamhede van die Ned. Geref. Kerke in Suid Afrika, (Bloemfontein: N.G. Sendingpers, 1953), 2.

dilemmas. “Our first point of departure is that the white population in South Africa is here on the basis of a definite and unquestionable right, which can be deprived by nothing and no-one”.⁵⁵²

Interestingly, this feeling of estrangement amongst white South Africans, and specifically Afrikaners, was one which sporadically flared up during the ensuing years. An uneasiness which the apartheid system failed to address and subdue. During the first half of the 20th Century it externalized itself in the overentitled claim, not only to residency, but to outright ownership and domination of the land. Gerdener argued, along with a remarkable majority of both English and Afrikaner whites, for example, that there could be no question of placing South Africa’s destinies in the hands of the black majority and that the country’s leadership should remain seated within the white population, as they depicted whites as being the bearers of civilisation. By the end of the century alienation reared its head in an utterly new and contrasting manner, as a young Afrikaner generation felt a growing disillusionment with the apartheid government and the supposed promises of its system. This anti-culture reached a high point at the end of the 1980s, propelled largely by a grass-roots cultural movement known as *Voëlvry*, which consisted of a group of Afrikaner musicians who protested the establishment through their satirical Afrikaans punk rock music.⁵⁵⁴ The *Voëlvry* movement inspired a later generation of Afrikaner musicians who voiced the still-prevalent feelings of Afrikaner estrangement during the early years of the 21st Century. This can be seen in the music of the band, *Fokofpolisiekar*, who made use of traditional Afrikaner imagery to depict their generation’s disillusionment. In songs such as *Tieneraksie Einde*, the band grapples with the same question as did their Afrikaner political predecessors regarding the survival of a white South Africa, and the Afrikaner’s position within this future: “white children of Africa, be grateful that you are still alive, what are you doing here, and where do you come from”.⁵⁵⁵

Affairs in South Africa in the 1940s were further complicated by Britain and France’s declaration of war against Germany, after Hitler invaded Poland on the 1st of September 1939, ushering in World War Two.⁵⁵⁶ Adolf Hitler ran his National Socialist Worker’s Party, better known as the Nazi Party, along fascist lines similar to Mussolini in Italy. Chiefly through his campaign to restore Germany’s sense of pride after the embarrassment of WWI, and assisted by his appeal to the lower working class amidst the dire economic state Europe found itself in, Hitler rose to power in 1932. This authoritarian dictatorship emphasized racial purity,

⁵⁵²Voorsittersrede by GBA Gerdener at the SABRA Congress of 1955. [DRC Archives in SA, VGK-SIN 568].

⁵⁵⁴Albert Grundlingh, ““Rocking the Boat” in South Africa? Voëlvry Music and Afrikaans Anti-apartheid Social Protest in the 1980s.” In: *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 37, no. 3 (2004): 483-514.

⁵⁵⁵Fokofpolisiekar, “Tieneraksie Einde,” track 1 on *Brand Suid-Afrika*, Rhythm, 2005, compact disc.

⁵⁵⁶Palmer, *The penguin dictionary of modern history 1789-1945*, 309.

propagated a deep-seated anti-Semitism and blamed Jews and Communists for all that was wrong with the world. In pursuit of achieving his ultimate goal of restoring Germany to her former glory, Hitler led his party with a political ideology known as National Socialism.⁵⁵⁷ In South Africa the declaration of war reopened old wounds and again emphasized the divide between the two white populations. In 1933, General Hertzog and Smuts joined their two political parties to form the United Party, with Hertzog as Prime Minister, partly in an effort to prevent white disunity.⁵⁵⁸ On the other hand, the uncompromising D.F. Malan could not amalgamate himself with the idea of coalition and now overtook Hertzog as the leader of the nationalist movement.⁵⁵⁹ After six years the inevitable crossroad for the fusion government was reached as the developing war presented an urgent question. Hertzog sought to protect South Africa's autonomy and encouraged neutrality, while the Imperially inclined Smuts, as Minister of Justice, declared that as a member of the British Commonwealth South Africa had a responsibility towards the Union Jack. This disagreement set the political arena ablaze. Hertzog claimed that entering the war alongside Britain would choke any progress made in rekindling English and Afrikaner relations, Smuts argued that Hitler's fascism and his agenda of world domination had to be stopped in its tracks and the republican opposition, headed by Malan, accused Smuts of once again ignoring the dire condition of the Afrikaner people by involving South Africa in Britain's war. Eventually the matter was put to a vote, with Smuts emerging victorious and resulting in South Africa's involvement in the war as a British ally.⁵⁶⁰ Subsequently, Hertzog resigned and after a series of complicated and drawn out negotiations, which revolved around the Party's name and principle of republicanism, the aged Afrikaner General and his followers reunited with Malan's NP, leaving Smuts once again as Prime Minister.⁵⁶¹ Superficially this represented a reuniting of Afrikaner leadership, however at its heart Afrikaner nationalism was more divided than ever before on political principles.

As in 1914, South Africa's entrance into a European war sparked unrest within the Afrikaner nationalist camp, this time in the form of openly pro-German organizations such as Oswald Pirow's New Order (NO) and the para-military, anti-war movement known as the Ossewabrandwag (OB). The OB sought to bolster the emotional high which came from the 1938 centenary celebrations and advocated for a free Afrikaner republic. In 1941 J.F.J. van Rensburg, who had served as administrator of the Free State and housed pro-Nazi sympathies, became the leader of the OB and injected a certain National-Socialist radicalism into the

⁵⁵⁷Julian Flanders, *Political hacks*. (London: Octopus Publishing Group, 2018), 78.

⁵⁵⁸Steyn, *Jan Smuts*, 123.

⁵⁵⁹Koorts, *DF Malan and the rise of Afrikaner nationalism*, 299.

⁵⁶⁰Steyn, *Jan Smuts*, 130.

⁵⁶¹Koorts, *DF Malan and the rise of Afrikaner nationalism*, 341.

organization, and concurrently into certain nationalist circles. Through its own division of storm troopers, known as the *Stormjaers*, the OB resisted the war through violent acts of sabotage throughout South Africa and rallied behind German victory in the hopes that the Germans would help establish an Afrikaner republic.⁵⁶² Anti-war sentiments were further enflamed through measures taken by the government, such as the confiscation of arms and ammunition from civilians as well as the use of black volunteers as semi-military helpers on the war front.⁵⁶³ The use of blacks in a white man's war and the consequences it would have on post-war race relations in South Africa was particularly worrying to Gerdener. In 1944 the DRC's mission council held a meeting of its inner circle in Stellenbosch, to brainstorm possible repercussions which the war might have on race relations. An acute fear was aired, especially by the member CF Kies: "the war gave non-whites rights on different terrains, which will cause dissatisfaction and grievances if it is taken away from them after the war... the natives were to a large degree made free from their tribal habits, and exposed to the atheistic communism and will be anti-everything to what the Afrikaner Christian holds dear. Race relations will be befuddled".⁵⁶⁴ Gerdener addressed this uncertainty in a more restrained manner and anticipated that the fate of any successful post-war reconstruction scheme would rest upon the good attitude of whites towards the black and coloured people. He further maintained that such a scheme would need to begin with God, be carried through in an optimistic cheerfulness and ultimately spill over into mission work.⁵⁶⁵ To add to Gerdener's war anxieties was the threat it posed to the universal Christian church and its mission work, especially considering the fact that it was the lands of Luther and Calvin that were engaged in war. However, true to his personality, Gerdener did not allow panic to overwhelm reason and urged the church to exude calmness in faith, to cling to the medium of prayer and the Bible all the more and to hold fast to God's recreating and rehabilitating nature. He also emphasized God's ability to use human evil in the fulfilment of his plans.⁵⁶⁶ On a more strategic level, the Native Affairs Commission, by this time with Gerdener as its chairman, argued that it was critical for the DRC to act on the reality of war, so as to free itself from any post-war accusations of idleness. To this end, the NAC advised the DRC Synods to send chaplains to the military fields with the specific task of serving the spiritual and moral needs of the coloureds and blacks, as a buffer to the ethical degradation which went along with such a bloody war.⁵⁶⁷ The NAC also moved to provide help

⁵⁶²Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners*, 442.

⁵⁶³David M. Scher, "Post-War race relations, 1902-1948," In: *A history of South Africa*, 278.

⁵⁶⁴Meeting minutes of the Stellenbosch Study Circle, 28 October 1944. [DRC Archives in SA, KS576].

⁵⁶⁵Meeting minutes of the Federal Mission Council, 31 March 1943. [DRC Archives in SA, Div 236].

⁵⁶⁶Op Die Horison, No. 4, October 1939.

⁵⁶⁷Meeting minutes of the Native Affairs Commission, April 1942. [DRC Archives in SA, SIN224].

to foreign mission societies who, due to the war, were cut off from all overseas financial support.⁵⁶⁸

Amidst this uncertainty the fate of Afrikaner nationalism and its future was once again in the cross hairs, as Malan's NP now faced the threat of being outflanked by the radical and volatile nationalism of the NO and OB. The latter saw itself as the only nationalist mass movement and so sought to replace the NP as the Afrikaner's political vehicle. Although Malan rejected South Africa's involvement in the war at every opportunity, he afforded no time to the idea of gaining power through non-parliamentary or authoritarian means and assured the English population that the NP's opposition to war was not the result of Nazi sympathies. Over the next three years the OB grew ever more dangerous as it rallied the more radical nationalists of the North and outright tension between the OB and NP now became visible. Through several tactical manoeuvres, Malan was able to distance the NP from the right-wing movement by 1943, despite the NP's pro-republican stance, and consolidate the Afrikaner opposition under his leadership. In so doing he bypassed the possible splintering of Afrikaner nationalism and all but extinguished the fire of the OB.⁵⁶⁹ On the 8th of May 1945, the Red Flag was raised in Berlin, signalling the defeat of Hitler and the end of WWII, while also broadly extinguishing the fascist and ultra-nationalist ideals of 20th Century Europe.⁵⁷⁰

National Socialism, as a remnant of the war, did find sympathies in South Africa, predominantly in the far right fringes of Afrikaner nationalism, reflected in the thoughts of Northern Afrikaner intelligentsia such as L.J. du Plessis, Piet Meyer, N. Diederichs and Geoff Cronjé.⁵⁷¹ That being said, the most influential Afrikaner leaders during the 1930s and 1940s, who were based in the Cape and had the heaviest hand in the formative stages of the apartheid ideology, did not ascribe to this blatantly racist ideology.⁵⁷² This group of Cape intellectuals, of which Gerdener was apart, also rejected the notion of biological racism which was rapidly losing status within academic circles. When arguing for the ideal that South Africa remain a white man's land, Gerdener made it clear that such an ideal was not to be grounded in a feeling of inherent superiority: "because scientifically it is not at all the case that the white naturally exceeds the black in all respects".⁵⁷³ In contrast, racial differences were, according to Gerdener, rooted in and determined by cultural, ethnical and religious parameters.⁵⁷⁴ A final nail in the coffin came when DF Malan, as leader of the Afrikaner nationalists, wrote off National

⁵⁶⁸Report from the Native Affairs Commission 1942. [DRC Archives in SA, SIN224].

⁵⁶⁹Koorts, *DF Malan and the rise of Afrikaner nationalism*, 363.

⁵⁷⁰Flanders, *Political hacks*, 76.

⁵⁷¹Giliomee, *The rise and demise of the Afrikaners*, 35.

⁵⁷²Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners*, 469.

⁵⁷³Op Die Horison, No. 2, 1944.

⁵⁷⁴*Ibid.*

Socialism as a concept foreign to the Afrikaner character. Referring to their Dutch and French Protestant roots, which instilled in Afrikaners a democratic nature, he concluded that a dictatorship would fail in South Africa.⁵⁷⁵ In general the most influential Afrikaner intelligentsia of the time, including Gerdener, tended more toward the model of the American South than Nazi Germany. The mainstream DRC also rejected National Socialism and its system of state domination, which ipso facto denied the church its freedom.⁵⁷⁶ Therefore, it would be wrong to argue that the NP, as leader of the nationalist movement, founded its anti-war and pro-republic position on National-Socialistic grounds. The political victory of the NP over its right-wing faction represented the victory of democracy over dictatorship and would consequently also determine the course taken by the nationalists going forward; a course which Gerdener unreservedly supported.⁵⁷⁷

A problem of colour

When speaking of race relations during the early 20th century, what was predominantly referred to was the relations between English and Afrikaans speaking whites. It was the importance of nurturing this relationship that informed the politics of Smuts and Hertzog.⁵⁷⁸ This emphasis shifted by the 1940s, as the relationship between black and white became a priority. At the heart of this racial conundrum, as Gerdener had elucidated, was a battle between the varied traditional racial policies of the two Boer republics and the two British colonies, further complicated by the intimidating number of Africans.⁵⁷⁹ The tensions in this racially charged decade were, moreover, only increased by the continuing influx of Africans into the cities, a phenomenon rooted in economic aspirations. In 1943 an investigation into the matter showed that the number of urbanized Africans had more than doubled from the previous decade, and that a major catalyst for this African immigration, mainly from the Transkei, was the military and industrial needs which arose from World War I and the commencing World War II. Gerdener published these findings in his journal, *Op Die Horison*, and, as was to be expected, took pains to point out the negative effect this reality had on the unique African national character as “many of them come from the most primitive of tribes and are then set free into the big city”.⁵⁸⁰ After further investigation Gerdener illustrated African urbanization

⁵⁷⁵Koorts, *DF Malan and the rise of Afrikaner nationalism*, 356.

⁵⁷⁶Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners*, 444.

⁵⁷⁷D.F. Malan, *Glo in U volk*. (Kaapstad: Tafelberg-Uitgewers, 1964), 39.

⁵⁷⁸Steyn, *Jan Smuts*, 130.

⁵⁷⁹Gerdener, *The Crux of the Racial situation in South Africa*, 284.

⁵⁸⁰*Op Die Horison*, No. 2, 1943.

as symptomatic of the poor economic state in which they existed, and concluded that: “the unrestrained influx [of Africans] will continue, unless the earning faculties and general standard of living is drastically increased in the Transkei”.⁵⁸¹ Gerdener also blamed poor legislative measures taken by the government to control African incursion and lobbied for a “strong registration process for the native and the guarantee of work and proper housing... each town must be given a fixed quota of natives for work”.⁵⁸²

The uncertain position of the coloured population within South Africa’s multi-racial fabric was also, in Gerdener’s opinion, compounded by this African influx. Gerdener vehemently opposed miscegenation and deplored the fact that the increased African presence amongst whites consequently led to an increase in inter-racial cohabitation. “The disaster of this added influx”, he maintained, “led to coloured numbers doubling over the past 20 years”.⁵⁸³ Ergo, Gerdener argued that an ‘irresponsible’ African influx had an adverse effect on race relations on all fronts; it disturbed the white society, detribalized Africans and threatened to destabilize the coloured population and therefore had to be remedied.⁵⁸⁴ This also intensified the Afrikaner’s fierce opposition to miscegenation on a wider level, as the mixing of blood was believed to lower the standards of all parties involved. A position even upheld by the far more pro-British Jan Smuts who already in 1923 argued that: “the mixing of up of two alien elements as white and black leads to unhappy social results, racial miscegenation and the moral deterioration of both”.⁵⁸⁵ As a result, the relation between different races in society and the control thereof began to dominate the South African political agenda from the 1930s, with the question of the coloured franchise often being used as an instrument by white politicians in a quest for survival.

The NP returned to power in the 1929 election and it was during this electoral campaign that coloureds began to be seen as a distinctive race for the first time. This idea of distinctiveness was generated largely from within the furnace of Afrikaner fear for the African masses, with the intention of driving a wedge between the coloured and black populations so as to prevent a united ‘non-white’ front. The only way, according to Hertzog’s NP, to incorporate coloureds politically and economically with whites was by drawing a line between black and coloured; a task which proved to be practically impossible.⁵⁸⁶ During the ensuing 1929 campaign, Hertzog proposed a bill which would abolish the Cape Franchise. Removing

⁵⁸¹Op Die Horison, No. 1, March 1946.

⁵⁸²Op Die Horison, No. 2, 1943.

⁵⁸³Op Die Horison, No. 2, 1943.

⁵⁸⁴Op Die Horison, No. 1, March 1946

⁵⁸⁵Gerdener, *The Crux of the Racial situation in South Africa*, 283.

⁵⁸⁶Giliomee, *The rise and demise of the Afrikaners*, 22.

from Africans the right to vote and replacing it with a white representative body. After this bill failed to find a majority vote in parliament, Hertzog, after his re-election, put forth an act which enfranchised white women and successfully brought the electoral influence of Cape Africans down to 3.1 percent and 1.4 percent on a Union wide level. In so doing the influence of the coloured vote was relationally diminished in significance.⁵⁸⁷ A further impetus for this political move was the unexpectedly low support which the NP received from the coloured faction, considering the effort it had invested into courting coloured votes, especially through its coloured counterpart, the *Afrikaanse Nasionale Bond*, which had attracted prominent members of the coloured community. In this the NP underestimated the strong influence of the *African People's Organization* led by Dr. Abdullah Abdurrahman, with its message of unity between black and coloured and its emphasis on coloured loyalty to the British Empire.⁵⁸⁸

In 1930, joint committees were selected, which included Hertzog, Smuts and the staunch segregationist Heaton Nicholls, to mull over the state of the franchise as well as other native bills, behind closed doors. These bills would eventually come to pass five years later. Within its first year the committee decided the fate of the Cape Franchise, as a majority of 18 to 8 voted for its abolishment. However, this development would only be made known to the public in 1935.⁵⁸⁹ Amongst the other bills drafted by the committee were the Native Trust and Land Bill, which sought to implement the principle of territorial separation, as well as the Native's Representation Bill. The latter Bill, once passed in 1936, would finally be the fulfilment of Hertzog's plan for political segregation, which he had been promoting since the 1920s. In its new guise, the Representation bill of 1936 was presented with the added feature of a Native Representative Council, which would act as an advisory body to Parliament regarding African affairs and was to be chaired by the minister of Native Affairs.⁵⁹⁰

Black resistance to these native bills was raised through influential individuals such as H.D. Tyamzashe, Z.K. Matthews, Alfred Xuma and D.D.T. Jabavu, who were predominantly trained within the English missionary tradition. These black leaders kept African militant movements at bay and maintained a constitutional track in their campaign of defending the Cape franchise. Anglican leadership also made their disapproval of Hertzog's Bills clear, dubbing the abolishment of the African vote unanimously un-Christian. To which Hertzog responded with the argument that the principle of self-preservation was equally important and even buttressed Christian principles.⁵⁹¹ The liberal J.H. Hofmeyr, a prominent parliamentarian

⁵⁸⁷Elphick, *The equality of believers*, 212.

⁵⁸⁸Scher, "Post-War race relations, 1902-1948," In: *A history of South Africa*, 275.

⁵⁸⁹Elphick, *The equality of believers*, 212.

⁵⁹⁰Gerdener, *The Crux of the Racial situation in South Africa*, 285.

⁵⁹¹Elphick, *The equality of believers*, 218.

and devotee of the social aspect of Christianity, was arguably the most noticeable Afrikaner voice to defend African political rights.⁵⁹² Hofmeyr, in his struggle against the abolishment of African rights, opposed the native bills as unjust and unfair. He argued that they were based on an absurd Afrikaner fear and maintained that there was a rising tide of liberalism in South Africa which could never support such legislation.⁵⁹³ Gerdener wrote disapprovingly of Hofmeyr's constant referral to segregation's historical failure and accused his liberalism of unnecessarily contorting and confusing the racial question. What most frustrated Gerdener about the liberalists' position was that it portrayed the Afrikaner's official position regarding race relations in a negative light, "to a circle who many times misunderstand our position or even don't know it at all"⁵⁹⁴. He believed this fundamentally weakened the Afrikaner's public image. Although not directly involved in the political discussions, Gerdener defended the separatist formula in his typical idealistic manner. He distinguished between a discrimination *between* people and a discrimination *against* people. "Discrimination against should be repudiated, while between is thoroughly just and should be applied in all walks of life... discrimination between people is so far from being against any party, that it actually protects and prepares for future development".⁵⁹⁵ In 1955, this exact argument was repeated to the World Council of Churches in a speech by the DRC minister, W.A. Landman, in his defence of the apartheid policy: "when we discriminate, it is not against but between people".⁵⁹⁶ Gerdener's idealistic position was further reinforced by the paternalistic tradition of 19th century Christian trusteeship, represented in his missional model, in that Gerdener believed the rights, privileges and responsibilities which centuries of Christian civilization bestowed should eventually become the possession of all, "but not until the minority (Africans) attains his majority".⁵⁹⁷ When all was said and done the Native Representation Act of Hertzog, now dubbed Bill No. 2 after slight adjustments, passed through Parliament with a vote of 169 to 11, and two months later the Native Trust and Land Act followed. As such, the hopes of a common citizenship between black and white was constitutionally removed.⁵⁹⁸

It was only after the disempowerment of the coloured vote in 1931 that the culture of a so-called pure and exclusive Afrikaner identity gained noticeable traction in the Western Cape. Coupled with the newly instituted political boundaries and an upsurge in an exclusive Afrikaner character, was the incentive for coloureds to discover and develop their own unique

⁵⁹²Richard Elphick, "The benevolent empire and the social gospel: missionaries and South African Christians in the age of Segregation," In: *Christianity in South Africa*, 358.

⁵⁹³Mouton, *Prophet without honour*, 172.

⁵⁹⁴Op Die Horison, No. 4. 1942.

⁵⁹⁵Gerdener, *The Crux of the Racial situation in South Africa*, 285.

⁵⁹⁶W.A. Landman, *Ons rassevraagstuk, die wereldmening en ons toekomst*. (Kaapstad; Citadel pers, 1955), 3.

⁵⁹⁷Ibid., 288.

⁵⁹⁸Elphick, *The equality of believers*, 219.

identity as a separate nation.⁵⁹⁹ Gerdener was an open supporter and propagator of a fully independent coloured identity. In his crusade to uphold and promote individual nationalities, separate and apart, Gerdener maintained that the state and the DRC “should strive to further the development of natives and coloureds along their own history and volk nature”.⁶⁰⁰ Gerdener was also one of the first individuals to suggest separate and socially layered coloured residential areas removed from blacks.⁶⁰¹ Already in 1939, he articulated this position by stipulating that: “the fear is that civilized portions of the coloured population will need to live with *skollies*”.⁶⁰² In a 1943 speech focusing on the racial question delivered at Stellenbosch University to a research circle, Gerdener expanded on his argument for territorial separation by stating that social mixing of different races stalled both the development of national pride and a sense of independence.⁶⁰³

As a means of navigating the delicate minefield of expanding segregation to the coloured community, which he believed in principle could not merely be carried over from the African population, Gerdener drew on the ecclesiastical model of the coloured mission church. He proposed that, instead of forcing “the good principle of segregation” upon this portion of society from within an atmosphere of fear, “an attractive own neighbourhood with all necessary facilities is obviously desired over the unhealthy shacks in which many coloureds must live today, and they will be attracted to this neighbourhood out of their own accord”.⁶⁰⁴ In his proposed plan, Gerdener argued for a small model coloured town to be erected on the Cape Flats, which would be fully equipped with all social facilities, on par with those found in white towns, and governed by coloured leaders.⁶⁰⁵ “Regarding housing schemes, municipalities must be made aware that neighbourhoods for coloureds must be 100% in all regards, as far as rights and opportunities are concerned”.⁶⁰⁶ Once implemented, Gerdener envisioned this model to stand as an example of the DRC’s sincerity and that it would then gradually be extended to incorporate the whole coloured race.⁶⁰⁷ This was packaged and sold as the only just manner of coloured segregation and as the only valid channel for coloured national expression. A way for the coloured population to “strive towards their own race development; in their own areas where they can live out their own lives and govern themselves”.⁶⁰⁸ This was however, far

⁵⁹⁹Giliomee, *The rise and demise of the Afrikaners*, 26.

⁶⁰⁰Op Die Horison, No. 4, 1942.

⁶⁰¹Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners*, 461.

⁶⁰²Op Die Horison, No. 2, April 1939.

⁶⁰³Op Die Horison, No. 2, 1944.

⁶⁰⁴Op Die Horison, No. 2, April 1939.

⁶⁰⁵Federal Mission Council memorandum, 13 March 1944. [DRC Archives in SA, 2437].

⁶⁰⁶Op Die Horison, No. 3, 1945.

⁶⁰⁷Report of the Federal Mission Council Commission for race-relations, 1944. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV226].

⁶⁰⁸Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, 1944. DIV226].

removed from what was realistically possible as the government simply did not have the resources to sustain a fully equipped separate coloured township.⁶⁰⁹

The majority of the Afrikaner church was also in support of a coloured identity removed from their own. In 1943, a memorandum, later used by the FMC, was drafted by some church leaders from the Transvaal with the church's role within the racial issue as one of its foci. With contributions from individuals such as G. Cronjé, W. Nicol and N. Diederichs, the memo made the church's position regarding race relations, including the specific relationship towards coloureds, blatantly clear: "the relationship between white and coloured must be clearly established. On the one hand the native (and coloured) is inspired with false ideas of equalization and on the other he is frightened with ideas of oppression... he must be helped to determine his own attitude towards whites, so he can share in the civilization and gospel".⁶¹⁰ According to Gerdener, a lack of racial pride amongst coloureds led to a mounting desire to assimilate themselves with whites. This was a reality which needed to be halted, and one which Gerdener believed could only be addressed through the forging of a unique coloured culture and nationality.⁶¹¹

When commenting on the complexity of racial relations in South Africa, Gerdener placed great emphasis on the responsibility which the church carried if the white race was to survive justly. This 'survival in justice' was a construct of liberal nationalism notably espoused by N.P. van Wyk Louw, one of the leading intellectuals of Afrikaner nationalism. He stressed that national death was preferable over a nation's toil for mere survival at the expense of other ethnic groups. In other words, van Wyk Louw interjected an ethical dimension to the Afrikaner's talks of survival within a heterogeneous country.⁶¹² Gerdener too was a prominent advocate of this ethical aspect in racial relations, and especially emphasized it when speaking to Afrikaner angst and urgency to survive as an independent nation: "we dare not pursue our own survival at the expense of the salvation or prosperity of any other section of society".⁶¹³ It was specifically in this regard that Gerdener promoted the Christian message and its mission work as the most suitable answer in the search for a solution to South Africa's racial problem.⁶¹⁴ Using argumentation akin to his missiological theories, Gerdener motivated the association of Christian mission to secular racial politics. In this bid for missional involvement, Gerdener seemed to exude a greater urgency regarding the social responsibilities of Christianity than he

⁶⁰⁹Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners*, 463.

⁶¹⁰Memorandum draft "regarding the mission", 2 September 1943. [DRC Archives in SA, 2437].

⁶¹¹FMC memorandum, 1942. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁶¹²Giliomee, *The rise and demise of the Afrikaners*, 51.

⁶¹³Op Die Horison, No. 2, 1944.

⁶¹⁴Gerdener, *The Crux of the Racial situation in South Africa*, 290.

had in decades prior. He still maintained that mission was in the first instance called to announce the gospel, however he now placed an increasing emphasis on the aspirational implications which were awakened within a post-pagan community by the evangelical message. It was at this intersection that missiology met racial politics in that “the mission affects the racial problem at different points and places”.⁶¹⁵

Drawing upon the natural consequences of evangelism as well as his fundamental missiology, Gerdener pointed out three main areas where the mission of the church had vested interest in the racial discourse. The first was related to the economic and social welfare of a nation. On this point Gerdener reflected the 19th century missionary tradition which emphasized the civilizing power of Christianity and argued that together with the gospel came the promise of an elevated living standard: “we expect better clothes, houses and food from our Christians as that of the heathen, and so we must take into account a development of the earning ability of Christians coming out of paganism”.⁶¹⁶ The organic element in Gerdener’s missiology informed his second point of contact which revolved around culture. Mission, as he contended, was intimately involved in the language, art and education of the native population. This meant that Christian mission played the most determinative role in safeguarding the indigenous African character. Gerdener believed that, in all aspects of African development, the church’s mission force was most efficiently positioned to police denationalization so as to prevent Western culture from being forced upon the African consciousness.⁶¹⁷ Finally, led by his inner moralist, Gerdener ascribed the most important missional connection to race relations to an ethical-religious component. In fact, he classified the whole racial dilemma as a question of religion and ethics rather than of legislation or science, because it revolved around personal relationships. Consequently, Gerdener placed the fate of healthy race relations in the hands of each, and specifically the white, individual Christian and argued that the determinative factor was their attitude towards the ‘non-white’. “In the last instance however, it depends on the good will of the white population itself, and the sacrifices he is willing to make, which will determine to what extent a happy and secure future can be created for white and black in our country”.⁶¹⁸ Gerdener, therefore, worked towards inspiring a culture of good nature between races at every turn and warded against any instance of racial prejudice arguing that “in the actions of a Christian believer there is no place for any race-hate of any nature... a culture of understanding one another and building one

⁶¹⁵Op Die Horison, No. 2, 1944.

⁶¹⁶Ibid.

⁶¹⁷Gerdener, *The Crux of the Racial situation in South Africa*, 291.

⁶¹⁸Voorsittersrede by GBA Gerdener at the SABRA Congress of 1953. [DRC Archives in SA, V GK-SIN 568].

another up needs to take the place of feelings of alienation and suspicion”.⁶¹⁹ It was primarily through this that Gerdener advocated for and justified missiology’s involvement in the racial dialogues of the country. Furthermore, he believed missiology not only had a stake in the matter, but that it was its very message that held the solution to the racial issue: “it is not the mission as such, but the mission as interpreter of the Christian truth, which has the solution”.⁶²⁰

DRC missional management federates

The ecumenical movement in South Africa was spearheaded by the General Missionary Conferences (GMC) which began in 1904, with the intention of coordinating the mission work of the various societies. Its leaders were the likes of Johannes du Plessis and Andrew Murray.⁶²¹ The GMC was later replaced by the Christian Council of South Africa (CCSA) in 1936, after John Mott, president of the International Missionary Council (IMC) which would later act as the permanent administrative office of the CCSA, was invited to South Africa by the GMC in 1934 to prepare the ground for a Christian council. The CCSA was a development within the ecumenical movement, a body which was more efficient and bureaucratic than the GMC, but which still held the closer cooperation of Christian forces in South Africa as its primary incentive. One additional function of this body within the new phase of ecumenism was, however, the emphasis on the spiritual and general well-being of “non-European races”.⁶²²

The initial drafting of a constitution for the new CCSA, which envisioned the Anglican, Methodist and Dutch Reformed Churches as its backbone, took place synchronously with the DRC’s efforts to formulate a federally agreed upon mission policy. The hope was raised amidst DRC circles that the CCSA’s constitution and the DRC mission policy would be able to be brought into principle agreement. Gerdener was an ally of inter-denominational ecumenism and as such used his position on the DRC Native Affairs Commission to advise each Synod of the DRC to affiliate with the CCSA.⁶²³ The result of this lobbying proved disappointing, as only the Transvaal DRC and its black mission church affiliated, with the Free State and Natal DRCs refusing to join outright. The Christian Council rewarded the Transvaal’s adherence by honouring the minister W. Nicol with the organization’s presidency. Nicol took advantage of this position by advocating for the DRC’s mission policy, and its ideology of apartheid, to the predominantly English CCSA in the hopes of convincing them of its good intentions. Nicol

⁶¹⁹Minutes of an ecclesial congress, 4-6 April 1950. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV 232].

⁶²⁰Op Die Horison, No. 2, 1944.

⁶²¹Crafford, *Aan God die dank*, 470.

⁶²²Elphick, *Equality of believers*, 268.

⁶²³Gerdener, *Reguit koers gehou*, 84.

was unsuccessful in his efforts to court DRC colleagues to join him on the CCSA, and as such was left unsupported in his solitary defence of the DRC's case to the Council.⁶²⁴ As far as the Cape DRC was concerned, it remained on the fence regarding affiliation. At its Synods of 1936 and 1940 the Cape expressed its support and cooperation towards the CCSA in principle, however, to the deep disappointment of the ecumenicists Nicol and Gerdener, refused official affiliation.⁶²⁵ Gerdener criticized the Cape's rather indifferent response to the CCSA's request for affiliation and expressed the hope that the Cape DRC would reverse its decision as he believed its idle attitude was irresponsible towards the wider Christian church. "Our prayer is that the Synod of the Cape will receive guidance in this – surely in the long run loose cooperation without affiliation is a misuse of privilege and without acceptance of responsibility".⁶²⁶

The final issue which broke down any possible chance of a DRC affiliation came during a Union-wide mission conference in 1938 when, amidst the culturally charged atmosphere, the idea of an autonomous mission council for Afrikaner churches was introduced.⁶²⁷ At a the Federal DRC meeting the following year this motion was given official authority: "The council of churches recommends that the various Synods set up an inter-church mission council which will be able to act uniformly on behalf of the DRCs on matters of mission".⁶²⁸ The responsibilities which went along with organizing such a panoramic missional board was subsequently handed over to Gerdener's NAC. By the end of 1940 J.H.M. Stofberg, the commission's secretary, had sent circulars to the four Synodal mission commissions requesting their compliance to the NAC's decision to establish a federated council, and by the next DRC meeting the following year the ground work for the commencement of the Federal Mission Council had been laid.⁶²⁹ In the same year, William Nicol and the Transvaal reluctantly abandoned its efforts at a CCSA collaboration in the wake of the proposed FMC. The main reasons for their withdrawal rested on the opposing views of the CCSA and the DRC regarding mission and racial policy, the common grievance that Afrikaans was not given its due by the largely English panel and the fact that the majority of Afrikaners with an ecclesiastical interest opted for a mission council steeped in Afrikaner identity and heritage. As a result, the CCSA became an ecumenical body for the English churches, whereas the soon to be constituted FMC would bind the Afrikaans churches. Exemplifying a growing divergence amongst the Afrikaner

⁶²⁴Elphick, *Equality of believers*, 270.

⁶²⁵Op Die Horison, No. 4. December 1940.

⁶²⁶Op Die Horison, No. 3, 1940.

⁶²⁷Gerdener, *Reguit koers gehou*, 85.

⁶²⁸Op Die Horison, No. 2, 1941.

⁶²⁹Letters from J.H.M. Stofberg on establishment of the FMC. [DRC Archives in SA, SIN224].

and English leaders regarding racial policy.⁶³⁰ To add to the FMC's isolation, Gerdener would report in a FMC meeting six years later that, again due to discrepancies regarding language and policy, affiliation with the ecumenical International Mission Council, which later merged with the World Council of Churches, was impossible. He reached this conclusion after attending an IMC meeting in Oegstgeest, Netherlands in 1948, as an FMC representative.⁶³¹

After the federal seal of approval was issued in 1941, the NAC, now chaired by Gerdener, was faced with the pragmatic question of structuring the proposed council. The FMC, once established, would absorb and replace the existing NAC; a body which Gerdener felt was restricted in its capacity to move the DRC to a decisive and unified missional action. Consequently, he nursed the hope that the new advisory body, in the form of the FMC, would be granted more room to take initiative regarding DRC mission policy and action: "may the mission council yet be given some room to move".⁶³² A sub-commission with the task of drafting a constitution for the developing FMC was then duly appointed by the NAC.⁶³³ The sub-commission consisted of representatives from the mission commissions of the Cape, Free State and Transvaal. Amongst the six members was J.G. Strydom, the influential drafter of the Free State mission policy, J.H.M. Stofberg, the mission secretary of the Transvaal, and Gerdener, who was also unanimously voted in as the task teams' chairman and as such was given the determinative voice in the formulation of the FMC's constitution. At a meeting of the sub-commission in mid-1941, the constitution was finalized. It stipulated that the primary reason for the FMC's existence was to consolidate and implement the federal mission policy of the DRC and further to promote unanimity on the mission front. Clearly influenced by Gerdener's rationale of missiology's secular responsibilities, the FMC constitution also widened its jurisdictional influence in the secular realm and beyond matters of mere mission work. It ensured that the FMC had a role to play in the country's racial discourse by articulating its contribution towards racial, social and economic questions. Finally, the constitution also included a note that, as part of its functions, the FMC would organize inter-racial conferences and meetings.⁶³⁴ This last-mentioned function of the FMC bore direct tones of Gerdener's personal philosophies, many of which were instilled in him during his years on the WCSF, in that he espoused the bringing together of people from different sides of the spectrum. Gerdener cherished differences of opinion, and rather than trying to silence opposing voices, he considered the exposure to alternative perspectives a hallowed and necessary process in the

⁶³⁰Crafford, *Aan God die dank*, 471.

⁶³¹Meeting minutes of the executive commission of the FMC, November 1948. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁶³²Op Die Horison, No. 2, 1941.

⁶³³Gerdener, *Reguit koers gehou*, 85.

⁶³⁴Concept constitution of the Federal Mission Council, 21 May 1941. [DRC Archives in SA, 2437].

difficult search for a solution to South Africa's racial questions. At a conference with black leaders in 1951 he made this position clear: "we must not, like in the past, grab at weapons, but rather in the spirit of Christ learn to understand each other, seek help and tolerate each other."⁶³⁵ He did, however, qualify this position by arguing that these meetings with 'the other' could only take place once personal ideals and principles were in place so as not to compromise the integrity of the contact. "It is a point of weakness if we are to avoid those who think differently... we should learn from each other but we should not lose our own identity, we are different and so are they."⁶³⁶ With the ideal of conversation over command, Gerdener urged that the FMC not become a self-absorbed white DRC entity. Instead he emphasized that the voices of missionaries, the mission church itself and the black and coloured communities were to be heard and heeded. He also argued that, if the FMC's policy of separate development was to be taken seriously on a broader level, it would need to open itself up to outside criticism. "If the FMC wants to live up to the perfect ideal of a Christian council... it will need to make its circle of influence wider than the church boundaries, so that our DRC mission policy – which we perceive to be healthy – will be able to prove its relevance and power to those who think differently".⁶³⁷

The FMC constitution was then sent to the four DRC Synods for approval. While the constitution was making its rounds, William Nicol wrote an important article in Gerdener's mission journal in which he aired some of his optimism for the FMC. Nicol hoped that it would re-unite the Afrikaner churches, especially the divided churches and mission churches of the Transvaal, which he believed would give the DRC mission policy more authority. He argued that this united Afrikaner front, behind its mission policy and racial principle of separateness, would be critical in their battle against the predominantly English policy of equalization. Nicol reiterated the secular ideals of mission work which his long-time colleague and friend, Gerdener, had made so clear: "our mission work also has a wider national intention and those who lead us should be in contact with all sorts of experts in our volk".⁶³⁸ This reference to experts in various fields, which were to be consulted, hinted at the pseudo-scientific character which the FMC would embody in its racial investigations.⁶³⁹ An ideal already expressed at the Union conference of 1938: "the federal churches are asked that a council be organised of experts... with the goal of determining the useful elements of the native's culture and to attain unity with regard to the ideal of autochthonous development and to see to what extent these

⁶³⁵Conference with black leaders, June 1951. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV230].

⁶³⁶Op Die Horison, No. 3, 1940.

⁶³⁷Op Die Horison, No. 2, 1941.

⁶³⁸Op Die Horison, No. 3, 1941.

⁶³⁹Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, March 1944. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV226].

things are to be allowed in the church.”⁶⁴⁰ After the alignment of all four Synods, the first meeting of the FMC took place on the 30th of April 1942. The meeting consisted of fourteen members, six of whom were Capetonian, and represented the four DRCs and three mission churches.⁶⁴¹ At this founding meeting, the constitution was finally approved and undersigned by Gerdener himself. After the structure of the council was decided, whereupon Gerdener was voted in as chairman, the meeting immediately moved to ensure the FMC’s authority to act and speak on behalf of the church on secular matter which involved mission, especially in connection with “all law which affects the morality and spiritual wellbeing of the coloured and native”.⁶⁴² As ramification of this, the FMC successfully positioned itself as a key advisory organ on racial matters for the ensuing years. Due to its significant contributions to the development of the eventual apartheid policy, which at this point was still in its infancy, it is important to bear in mind the majority stake held by the Cape church in FMC management, with Gerdener as its chairman.

The second order of business for the FMC was the commissioning of a suitable organ through which to propagate its work and rationale. In January 1939, Gerdener started the mission periodical, *Op Die Horison* (ODH), with the hope of it eventually becoming a federal DRC mouthpiece, such as the *Kerkbode* was, on the subject of mission. A plethora of mission papers existed within DRC circles by the time ODH made its appearance, however what set it apart was its supposed scientific approach to missiology, as opposed to the ‘popular descriptive perspective’. Governed, edited and directed by Gerdener, ODH reflected all of his tendencies and concentrated on topics surrounding anthropology, religious history and race relations. Further, ODH took it upon itself to keep all DRC circles informed regarding mission, ward against any misinterpretation of the DRC mission policy and to propagate said policy, invite outsider’s opinion into the dialogue and in all this remain rooted in the Bible and DRC confessions.⁶⁴³ In certain aspects ODH was quite liberal for its time. It was unique amongst Afrikaner papers in that it frequently published articles written by black and coloured individuals. As editor, Gerdener emphasized the importance of giving all populations a space in his journal’s struggle towards a common racial policy: “we want to know what blacks and coloureds envision for the future of their volk and what they think of the policy, legislation and general action regarding race relations of the white... with the goal of finding a way which will be to the benefit of all”.⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴⁰Op Die Horison, No. 3, 1940.

⁶⁴¹Gerdener, *Reguit koers gehou*, 85.

⁶⁴²Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, 30 April 1942. [DRC Archives in SA, 2437].

⁶⁴³Op Die Horison, No. 1, 1939.

⁶⁴⁴Op Die Horison, No. 3, 1943.

The members of the FMC highlighted the importance of having an official and unified paper through which to formally consolidate the four DRCs with regard to federal mission and racial policy.⁶⁴⁵ The alignment of DRC opinion was of vital importance to the mechanics of Gerdener's racial strategy and to this end he toiled to counter mass confusion as inter DRC conflict threatened to undermine his racial blueprint. This was reflected when he berated fellow FMC member, J.G. Strydom in 1943, for publishing a Free State DRC racial-relations pamphlet before the federal DRC had determined its official position.⁶⁴⁶ To improve inter-DRC communication, Gerdener suggested that the management of ODH be approached with the assignment, and in the editorial of a 1942 edition he reported that "the general mission commission of the Cape accepted the request of the Federal Mission Council for *Op Die Horison* to serve as its mouthpiece... our paper will thus express the work of the Council and its commissions".⁶⁴⁷ Apart from ODH, Gerdener also gained public access through a monthly column in the *Kerkbode*, which started in 1946 and was known as, *Op die sending front*, in which he discussed missional matters. Further, the *South African Broadcasting Company* later afforded Gerdener a national platform to speak about DRC mission via a monthly radio broadcast.⁶⁴⁸ As a result, Gerdener wielded an exceptional amount of power and influence as he was simultaneously the chairman of the DRC's most copious missional body as well as its chief disseminator.

The principle of separate development formed the basis for all FMC operations as it was convinced that this was the only feasibly just solution to the racial problem.⁶⁴⁹ Starting from this principle the council approached racial matters from a studious and so-called scientific angle, and within its first year a permanent sub-commission was established specializing in racial matters.⁶⁵⁰ Through this commission all manner of liaisons were organized in which white, coloured and black church leaders were consulted on the most pressing racial matters.⁶⁵¹ Over and above this, the commission conducted several academic investigations into different facets of the racial question, such as its enquiry of 1943 into the coloured community's social bitterness.⁶⁵² The following year the commission presented its report in which it demarcated three factors which most profoundly complicated the coloured question, to the FMC. It stated that in the first instance, contrary to the African people, the coloured population had no heritage

⁶⁴⁵Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, 30 April 1942. [DRC Archives in SA, 2437].

⁶⁴⁶*Op Die Horison*, No. 1, 1943.

⁶⁴⁷*Op Die Horison*, No. 3, 1942.

⁶⁴⁸Report of the *Op die sending front* column, written by Gerdener, 1958. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV230].

⁶⁴⁹Craffors, *Aan God die dank*, 468.

⁶⁵⁰Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, 31 March 1943. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁶⁵¹Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, 1945. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁶⁵²Federal Mission Council, Southern Study Circle minutes, 28 August 1943. [DRC Archives in SA, 2437].

of their own and therefore had no independent identity. Secondly, the language used by coloureds was the same as the Afrikaner's and, coupled with that, they had white blood flowing through their veins. The final and most problematic matter, however, was the socially close proximity between coloureds and whites in the Western Cape, which led to economic interdependency.⁶⁵³ This all contributed to the tendency of gravitating towards 'whiteness' within coloured aspirations, and for this to be prohibited a clear distinction had to be found between white and coloured.⁶⁵⁴ In 1947, the same commission met again with coloured leaders in a sectional meeting, this time with a more positive discussion surrounding the crafting of a policy geared to improving social relations between coloureds and whites. Gerdener expressed his need for the DRC to take the lead in the constructing of this policy so as to ensure Afrikaner coordination, as well as "a definite church-like and Christian basis for such a policy".⁶⁵⁵

The topic of blood mixture and the consequent reality of a coloured population, which seemed to fit uncomfortably within the Afrikaner's conceived social structure, quickly became a prominent FMC agenda point. The nationalist academic most obsessed with this concept of racial mixing and the coloured people, was the Pretorian Sociologist Geoffrey Cronjé. He spoke of the disastrous effects of miscegenation and depicted the coloured people as the living examples of this sad process.⁶⁵⁶ In its investigations into miscegenation, the FMC consulted several academics, one of whom was Cronjé and his work on the subject. One article written by the Pretorian academic and used by the FMC, took the position that the social result of blood mixing was the degradation of white living standards which placed the racial pride and self-respect of the white population in jeopardy. Cronjé, being rather paranoid, contended that through the convoluted course of cross-racial relations the possibility arose for tainted blood to infiltrate the pure European bloodline through coloured individuals who could superficially pass for white, and therefore concluded that the coloured person was the greatest threat to white racial purity. "In this manner", Cronjé argued, "blood mixing leads to the infiltration of non-white blood into the European race which, for the latter [the white], is deadly".⁶⁵⁷ Drawing from this paper, the FMC included in its corresponding report that, "we believe that our preservation, as whites, lies in racial Apartheid and that it is therefore necessary" and in this respect justified that "the church will in a timely and untimely manner point out the dangers of blood mixing and the subsequent demise of the white race and in all seriousness will warn against it and promote the building of national pride."⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵³Report of the Federal Mission Council race relations commission, 1944.

⁶⁵⁴Op Die Horison, No. 3, 1939.

⁶⁵⁵Report of Race relations commission, September 1947. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁶⁵⁶Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners*, 471.

⁶⁵⁷Geoffrey Cronjé, *bloedvermenging as Maatskaplike proses*. [DRC Archives in SA, 2437].

⁶⁵⁸Conclusions drawn from G. Cronje's paper. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV227].

To a limited degree, this concept of racial purity appeared in some of Gerdener's thoughts: "the Afrikaner nation is unique in that it doesn't have a reservoir overseas of pure blood, as the English do, thus they see the problem of miscegenation in a different way; as means of keeping their race pure".⁶⁵⁹ He further supported racial separation on grounds of cultural survival: "for us racial purity is an article upon which we stand or fall".⁶⁶⁰ However, unlike the staunchly racist stream from which Cronjé drew, Gerdener's disdain of racial mixing was encompassed by the principle of Christian guardianship. To his mind, the necessary racial barriers and differentiations in South Africa which the FMC advocated would only be temporarily implemented until the whole population reached a state of true equality; at which point these boundaries could be removed. That being said, Gerdener saw miscegenation as a social ill and rallied himself against the growth of a coloured population: "but, what must be fought against is the unconscious bastardization process, both in blood and culture".⁶⁶¹ Using other dubious scientific studies, one of which accentuated the negative impact which racial mixing had on the mental, physical and moral development of the coloured offspring, the FMC built its case uncompromisingly against miscegenation.⁶⁶² As a conclusion to its investigations, the FMC adopted the ideal of coloured separateness and independence as its solution to the coloured question. "The salvation of the coloured as an individual and a society, in the temporal and spiritual areas... rests in their individual, communal and ecclesial independence under the leadership of the coloured himself".⁶⁶³

Essential to the FMC's segregationist ideals was the oversight of education, a matter which already received a permanent commission at the founding meeting with J.G. Strydom as its convenor.⁶⁶⁴ At this time the majority of African schools in South Africa were established and managed by missionaries. The South African Act, implemented together with the inauguration of the Union in 1910, granted growing influence to provincial administrators over these schools. However, missions remained financially and administratively involved in schools and as such maintained a powerful voice in education policy.⁶⁶⁵ This changed by the middle of the century as the government expressed its desire to centralize native education under the exclusive authority of the government.⁶⁶⁶ In a memorandum brought before the minister of Native Affairs in 1944, the FMC presented its position regarding the control of native education and accredited its authority on the matter to the DRC's bulk standing within

⁶⁵⁹Op Die Horison, No. 3, 1939.

⁶⁶⁰Op Die Horison, No. 1, 1947.

⁶⁶¹Ibid.

⁶⁶²Federal Mission Council memorandum, 1 October 1942. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁶⁶³Federal Mission Council race relations report, March 1944. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁶⁶⁴Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, 30 April 1942. [DRC Archives in SA, 2437].

⁶⁶⁵Elphick, *Equality of believers*, 181.

⁶⁶⁶Op Die Horison, No. 1, March 1949.

the Afrikaner population, as well as to its pioneering work in the education of South African blacks as a home-grown mission entity. With the intention of keeping all native issues together, the FMC advocated the placing of native education under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Native Affairs, as opposed to the Minister of Education. In its proposal the FMC suggested a specialized commission be formed, led by an anthropologist, as a sub-department within the Native Affairs Department, with the sole task of managing African education. This was in strategic contradiction to the Education Minister, J.H. Hofmeyr, who argued that the Native Affairs Department was ill-equipped to deal with matters of education. He further defended the authority of the Union Education Department on the grounds that the native education system substantially relied on Union grants coming from general taxes.⁶⁶⁷ As such, stark disagreement surrounded this question within white leadership. The predominantly English *Institute for Race-Relations* supported Hofmeyr's reasoning while the *Afrikanerbond vir Rassestudie* was in accordance with the FMC's recommendation.⁶⁶⁸ As a result, the tension rested squarely on intended racial policy. In other words, the FMC's argument for native education to be handled by the Native Affairs Department, as opposed to the general Education Department, served its agenda of preserving an independent African nationalism separate from whites. "The danger of blatant imitation of European education will be prevented under the Minister of Native Affairs, where the building up of native education can be unobstructed... By placing native education under a separate department within the native affairs department doesn't mean the demoting of educational standards; but rather that African education must carry its own character. It must be self-sustaining and unique".⁶⁶⁹ As a compromise, Hofmeyr agreed that a representative advisory body would be established under the Union Department of Education, providing council to the minister on matters of African education and financing. J.G. Strydom often acted as the FMC representative on said council.⁶⁷⁰ After the air had cleared, all DRCs, except for the Free State, lent their support to state absorption of mission schools under the nationalistic precepts of maintaining a separate African identity in their education.⁶⁷¹

Another topic broached by the 1944 deputation concerned a pressing educational matter for Gerdener; that of separate coloured and black universities. A critical element to Gerdener's ideal of total separation was the necessity for racially demarcated areas to be governed by leaders from within the specific black and coloured communities. To this end specialized black and coloured universities were essential. "Since the eventual goal of any university is to form

⁶⁶⁷Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, March 1944. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁶⁶⁸Op Die Horison, No. 1, 1944.

⁶⁶⁹Federal Mission Council memorandum, 13 March 1944. [DRC Archives in SA, 2437].

⁶⁷⁰Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, September 1948. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁶⁷¹Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, May 1950. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

leaders of the volk”.⁶⁷² The FMC further emphasized that, for these tertiary institutions to be successful, they needed to be on a par with that of white universities and in “spirit had to be Bantu-national as well as South African orientated”.⁶⁷³ In response to the frequent lobbying from the FMC on the matter, the Prime Minister responded by stating that, although the government supported the concept of separate universities, its statute did not include the establishment of separate state universities for blacks and coloureds. What the government did do, however, was supply subsidiaries to private initiatives which provided Africans with provisional tertiary classes, which could eventually develop into fully recognized universities. The government used the University of Fort Hare as an example of what was meant by this developmental process. Such provisional classes for African students were already being conducted in Pretoria and Bloemfontein, and the FMC arduously campaigned for a similar organization which could provide coloured students with these classes and lay the foundation for an eventual coloured university in the Cape.⁶⁷⁴

In 1949, one year after the victory of the nationalists and four years before Hendrik Verwoerd rolled out his Bantu Education Act, the FMC presented an extensive memorandum to the Native Affairs Department spelling out the DRC’s official position with regards to an education policy. In the first instance the church would only lend its support to an educational policy which was universal in application. In its opening statement the memorandum summarized the elements of native education which the church deemed fundamental. Acknowledging the African people as a separate race the FMC stated its guiding principle as: “the purpose of native education should be the development and preparation of the Bantu youth on a Christian foundation, and in accordance with their own aptitude, abilities and historical-national background, inside their own community, for useful citizenship within a progressive Bantu-community, which can functionally fit into the South African society as a whole”.⁶⁷⁵ Typical of the FMC’s character, what followed was an anthropological explanation of the destructive effects which an individualistic Westernization had on African nationalism and, as an antidote to this detribalization, held that native education must “attach to what is the volk’s own as much as possible and must resultantly differ from that of the white’s education”.⁶⁷⁶ In its conditions the deputation lobbied for the medium of instruction to be mother-tongue, inclusion of religious catechism in the syllabus, and that the education system would promote Bantu-nationalism, that the state languages of Afrikaans and English be taught as equals and

⁶⁷²Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, October 1949. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV 236].

⁶⁷³Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, September 1945. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁶⁷⁴Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, September 1947. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁶⁷⁵Federal Mission Council memorandum, October 1949. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁶⁷⁶Ibid.

that the DRC would be given full religious authority in and around the schools.⁶⁷⁷ The FMC also accepted the principle of differentiated education for Africans. A principle already proposed by missionaries at the start of the century, which held that education should be pragmatically adapted to the needs of the African people.⁶⁷⁸ Following this, the memorandum advocated the moving away from European bookish education to a so called ‘education for life’. Consequently, it supported the establishment of industrial schools and that syllabuses be adapted to best prepare the African masses for their unique struggle towards economic development. “The syllabus must be curated to best prepare the African for his unique context, since the large majority of the native population will need to survive from manual labour”.⁶⁷⁹ This proposal by the DRC regarding native education, and wider racial matters, was brought before Verwoerd several time by the FMC. Gerdener was also part of the South African Institute of Race Relation’s eight man commission on native education in 1949/51, which was led by the anthropologist W. Eiselen and significantly influenced subsequent legislation.⁶⁸⁰ Consequently the infamous educational legislation which Verwoerd would later implement as Prime Minister would, to a certain extent, have been influenced by the FMC and the thoughts of the ubiquitous Gerdener.⁶⁸¹

Apart from its work in the racial and educational commissions, the FMC geared itself toward the upliftment of the medical, socio-political and economic state of the black and coloured populations through related commissions. It also dealt with matters of domestic and international mission work, took an active anti-Communist position and acted as a source of information to all portions of society.⁶⁸² In all these arenas, and specifically regarding racial policy, the FMC made good on its secular intentions. It frequently lobbied government to ban mixed marriages as well as to implement legislation preventing the racial mixing between whites and coloureds. Further, it pushed for total racial segregation in both residential and industrial terrains.⁶⁸³ In these segregated native areas, and in service of its ideal of complete separation, the FMC also campaigned for better health services to be provided by the state in the form of native clinics.⁶⁸⁴ Many of these recommendations by the FMC would eventually become key factors in the NP’s apartheid legislation. Ironically, a matter which was also frequently emphasized by the FMC was the request that the racial question in its entirety be

⁶⁷⁷Ibid.

⁶⁷⁸Elphick, *Equality of believers*, 184.

⁶⁷⁹Federal Mission Council memorandum, October 1949. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁶⁸⁰Summary of the report of the commission in Native Education, 1949-1951. [DRC Archives in SA, VGK-SIN568].

⁶⁸¹Meeting between H.F. Verwoerd and Gerdener, 17 November 1950. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV228].

⁶⁸²Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, September 1947. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁶⁸³Federal Mission Council memorandum, 1942. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁶⁸⁴Federal Mission Council memorandum, 1944. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

kept free from party politics, as they believed it hindered white unanimity on racial policy.⁶⁸⁵ The Prime Minister repeatedly responded that the government shared the church's ideal for territorial and industrial segregation in principle, however "the idea of keeping racial affairs out of party politics was unrealistic. It would take more than 100 years for this to happen".⁶⁸⁶

The greatest influence exerted by Gerdener through the FMC was his work in expanding the DRC mission policy and its construction of a comprehensive racial policy. In abiding with the so-called Reforming tradition, Gerdener held that all church documents were organic by nature and so had to be constantly adapted to the ever-changing times.⁶⁸⁷ This led to a sub-commission convened by Gerdener in 1943, which was specifically focused on the expansion of the 1935 DRC policy. The FMC was given Synodal authority to edit the federal mission policy and for two years Gerdener led work on its revision. Only slight additions were eventually made to the old policy, however they fundamentally reflected Gerdener's personal missiology. The opening line based the policy and its corresponding missiology on the same three-fold formula of God's decision, promise and command which Gerdener had emphasized throughout his life and ministry. Further, the three major additions to the policy served Gerdener's principles of paternalistic trusteeship, autochthonous development and evangelism. It stated that the church granted the coloured and native an equal education to that of whites, one which was rooted in their own history, geared towards their unique future and to be received in their own areas. In terms of the economic and social upliftment of the coloured and black populations, the policy ensured the church's support as it stipulated these to be the natural implications of evangelism. Finally, under the 'social well-being' sub-heading of the policy, Gerdener included a paragraph which profoundly reflected the core of his social segregationist system: "the policy of trusteeship, as is being practiced at present, must gradually transition into a policy of complete independence and self-determination for the coloured and native in their own community, school and church. All differentiated treatment is still considered and intended by the DRC to promote life and independence".⁶⁸⁸

This policy was accepted by the federal DRC in 1945 and it would serve to dictate the DRC's mission work until the re-unification of the four DRCs in 1962.⁶⁸⁹ Gerdener took immense pride in this policy, which he had largely crafted, and devoted considerable time to publicizing it. Gerdener advertised it as a sincere and progressive document which envisioned the best for all portions of the heterogeneous society, in adherence to Christian principles.

⁶⁸⁵Op Die Horison, No. 2, 1943.

⁶⁸⁶Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, March 1944. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁶⁸⁷Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, September 1945. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁶⁸⁸Revised DRC mission policy, 1945. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁶⁸⁹Crafford, *Aan God die Dank – Deel 2*, 385.

Using this as ammunition he confidently rebutted any and every criticism by outsiders and ascribed most opposition predominantly to prejudice and misunderstanding.⁶⁹⁰ In anticipation of any misunderstanding, the FMC appointed different brochure committees, each tasked with translating the policy into relevant languages and to further clarify the DRC's good intentions. As a result, five distinctively tailored brochures were produced and distributed to the Afrikaner, English, Zulu, Xhosa and Coloured populations. In collaboration with the *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniging*, each brochure used around 3000 words to defend the DRC's policy, and its principle of separate development, to each specific community.⁶⁹¹ The brochure intended for the black community, for example, stated the following: "it is very clear that the DRC means well with the native, holds his highest interests at heart and is not, as is claimed by some, intent on making him a slave... the DRC thus asks for the willing cooperation from all natives to make this ideal [of the DRC] a reality".⁶⁹² It was of grave importance to the FMC that publicity of its church's policy remain firmly under its control. To this end it was decided at a sectional meeting with coloured leaders in 1945 that: "South African writers must be made aware that any contravening expressions must be avoided. It should rather be delayed so as to bring the commendable things in the church's life and work to the fore".⁶⁹³

Political leaders were frequently baited by the FMC with this policy and its entrenched message of separate development with the intention of "influencing these leaders towards the desired direction".⁶⁹⁴ Many influential members of Parliament were, however, supporters of the DRC policy and actively advocated it. "Where the DRC, with its healthy policy, contributes so much towards the economic, mental and spiritual upliftment of the native, there more publicity must be given to it".⁶⁹⁵ Consequently, this prepared the way for intimate DRC and state cooperation through the FMC and specifically through Gerdener, who now stepped more firmly into a political role.

A policy of trust and sacrifice

By the 1940s, the small group of liberals, with J.H. Hofmeyr as the leading torchbearer, had managed to alter the terms of the racial debate away from a crude racist repressionism to one focused on cultural adaption. Some even proposed an integrated society with a shared

⁶⁹⁰Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, September 1947. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁶⁹¹Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, September 1945. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁶⁹²Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, September 1947. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁶⁹³Gerdener, *Reguit koers gehou*, 103.

⁶⁹⁴Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, September 1945. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁶⁹⁵Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, September 1947. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

political identity.⁶⁹⁶ Alfred Hoernlé was a leading liberal intellectual at the time and professor of philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand; the same institution at which Hofmeyr was principal before his turn to politics in 1924.⁶⁹⁷ Speaking on the segregationist camp, Hoernlé distinguished between ‘single-minded segregationists’ who cared only for white survival in the midst of black fear, and ‘double-minded segregationists’ who sought the analogous development of white and black under white control. Without exception, Gerdener fell in the latter category and at a meeting with black leaders in 1951 he defined what he meant by this sort of development: “each nation or racial group must protect his own language and tradition and all groups must learn to respect each other in their coexistence”.⁶⁹⁸ Coupled with this position was the strenuous task of restraining the selfishness of single-minded segregationists for the greater good, while at the same time convincing the integrationists of his policy’s merits.⁶⁹⁹

As a liberal, Hoernlé agreed with Hofmeyr when he argued that a liberal spirit was incompatible with a white fear for the continuation of its own superiority, but also agreed with Gerdener’s remarks regarding South Africa’s uniquely complex racial fabric. This complexity was the result of a vast heterogeneous character with the whites, as Africa’s supposed leaders, in the minority.⁷⁰⁰ Hoernlé, for example, resisted the idea of racial mixing on social and political grounds, and considered race purity an essential aspect to the building of racial pride. In spite of this, he dismissed the principle of Christian trusteeship, which had considerably shaped South African law, as merely an elongated route to eventual white domination. A position which Gerdener confidently rebutted: “any tutelage on the part of the Union Government will certainly not be in the nature of domination”.⁷⁰¹ In pursuit of a principle befitting the liberal spirit Hoernlé threw down the gauntlet before the liberalists and urged that the movement form its own long-term plan for South Africa. As basis for practical policy, Hoernlé predicted three possible outcomes for South Africa in a lecture delivered in 1939. *Parallelism*, he contended, was doomed from inception as it was irremovable from tenets of white domination. *Assimilation*, on the other hand, would inevitably spill over into social, political, cultural and economic integration which would never be accepted by white South Africans. Surprisingly, Hoernlé presented his final predication of *total separation*, into what he called different ‘areas of liberty’, to be thought of as a truly liberal ideal.⁷⁰² Hofmeyr often

⁶⁹⁶Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners*, 447.

⁶⁹⁷Richard Elphick, “The benevolent Empire and the Social Gospel,” In: *Christianity in South Africa*, 362.

⁶⁹⁸Conference with native leaders, June 1951. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV230].

⁶⁹⁹Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners*, 449.

⁷⁰⁰Op Die Horison, No. 1, 1947.

⁷⁰¹Gerdener, *The crux of the racial situation in South Africa*, 285.

⁷⁰²Elphick, *Equality of believers*, 266.

times echoed this logic but questioned the willingness of the white population to make the sacrifices mandatory for such a policy's triumph.⁷⁰³

Gerdener accepted this solution not only as a liberal idea, but one which was also genuinely nationalist and segregationist in principle. He persistently advertised the positive ideals of segregation which he believed had not yet been fully tested. Like his mentor, Johannes du Plessis, Gerdener understood the power of words and so began the defence of his proposed segregation on a terminological front. He was not a strong advocate of the word 'apartheid', as he believed it carried negative connotations. "*Apartheid*, a word which for us sounds too negative as a key term for an undertaking which needs to flow out of good will and needs to be constructive through and through."⁷⁰⁴ Resultantly, Gerdener argued that it was critical for the Afrikaners to explain what was meant by their word and, if possible, that a more constructive term be found.⁷⁰⁵ Gerdener considered words such as 'separatism' and 'apartheid' to be root causes for the widespread misunderstanding which hung over the nationalists' intentions. "Through these terrible words we bring across the wrong idea that we want to rid ourselves of the coloured and native... We mean, fundamentally, independent development; let us say it!"⁷⁰⁶ He preferred terms such as 'separate development' and 'independent development' which supposedly carried a more progressive energy by better defining the positive side of the nationalist's policy, i.e. the whites' good nature towards mutual African development.⁷⁰⁷

By the time the NP began its campaign for the 1948 election, the religiosity of the apartheid policy had already crystallized. In 1947, a conference of church ministers in Pretoria, led by D.J. Keet, emphasized its biblical position towards apartheid: "in its broad features, the Holy Scriptures maintain the existence of separate peoples and condemns mixing between different peoples and races which can impair the Christian religion and civilization... The church's policy of race-Apartheid is in agreement with the Bible".⁷⁰⁸ In his mission quarterly, Gerdener published articles from both ends of the spectrum. He gave space to individuals such as J.H. Kritzinger who argued that God willed race exclusivity by using biblical verses such as Acts 17:26, cherished amongst apartheid supporters.⁷⁰⁹ Room was also afforded to theologians such as B.J. Marais and B.B. Keet, who had embarked on their lonely campaign against biblical justification of apartheid. Both of these men refuted the hermeneutical approaches of the DRC

⁷⁰³Gerdener, *The crux of the racial situation in South Africa*, 285.

⁷⁰⁴Op Die Horison, No. 1, 1943.

⁷⁰⁵Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, September 1945. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁷⁰⁶Op Die Horison, No. 2, 1943.

⁷⁰⁷Gerdener, *The crux of the racial situation in South Africa*, 287.

⁷⁰⁸Op Die Horison, No. 1, 1947.

⁷⁰⁹Ibid.

Synods and argued that there were no biblical accounts of separation based on national or racial origins.⁷¹⁰ Amidst the racial debates surrounding the middle of the century, and in stark contrast to the position taken by the minister's conference of 1947, the coloured DRC mission presbytery of Wynberg declared in the following year that it found no biblical grounds for separation based on colour and called upon the newly elected NP not to go ahead with its strict apartheid legislations.⁷¹¹ In attempts to overcome these differences on racial policy across social divides, Gerdener also approached black church leaders to hear their opinions in ODH on apartheid. An article, written by a black DRC minister in 1950, categorized African people into three broad groups. The first group supported the understanding of apartheid as the separation of races into complete and independent entities which made room for self-determination. The second group hated the term while the third group, which contained the majority, were apathetic. The author of the article, Samuel Tena, concluded that the biggest issue was the uncertainty which clouded the African's understanding of apartheid, and expressed a certain discomfort with the mother DRC's backing of apartheid without sufficiently consulting black ministers.⁷¹²

Gerdener did not agree with the direct biblical justification of apartheid, but rather based his advocacy of the policy on historical and cultural grounds. He argued that racial relations in South Africa, and the eventual course of said relations, were reciprocally related to the arrival of whites in 1652.⁷¹³ In defence of the apartheid system and in response to the decision made by the recent Wynberg presbytery, he doubled down on this position by arguing that a policy of racial separateness was no new initiative. He contended that it had already been a long accepted principle in secular legislation and a well-entrenched policy within the DRC for almost a century.⁷¹⁴ This historical position was one of commonplace within DRC mission leadership and one of the few points agreed upon by both Gerdener and Strydom.⁷¹⁵ In terms of his religious appropriation of apartheid, Gerdener did not base racial differences on mere accidents of pigment, but rather on the essentials of culture. "No one would dare contend that someone is inferior just because his skin is darker in colour. But, if colour is paired with a different social structure, with a different language, tradition and lifestyle, then a colour bar is no longer an accident but an essential".⁷¹⁶ Based on this, and in reference to the DRC model of church segregation, Gerdener justified the church's position. He maintained that his proposed

⁷¹⁰Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners*, 463.

⁷¹¹Op Die Horison, No. 4, 1948.

⁷¹²Op Die Horison, No. 1, 1950.

⁷¹³Op Die Horison, No. 1, 1947.

⁷¹⁴Op Die Horison, No. 4, 1948.

⁷¹⁵Op Die Horison, No. 4, 1943.

⁷¹⁶Op Die Horison, No. 1, 1947.

policy of separate development would serve both the DRC mission policy as well as ease racial friction through upholding the ultimate ideal of equality on separate terrains. The attainment of such an ideal, which would do away with the then prevalent trustee-minor relationship, Gerdener admitted, pivoted on mutual trust. Thus, in lobbying for his policy of trust, Gerdener took pains to soften any suspicion amongst Africans and urged the DRC as well as the wider Afrikaner people to make an effort to win the trust of blacks and coloureds by ensuring them of the Afrikaner's accountability and sincerity.⁷¹⁷

Gerdener's support for total separation tellingly escalated as the 1940s progressed. In 1943, Gerdener criticized an article written by three Stellenbosch academics, in which they argued for a totally segregated society which would be realized only through a strong nationalistic spirit and under the leadership of a government sympathetic to the Afrikaner's plea. Gerdener argued that their rendition of total segregation underestimated the cardinal economic, political and social complexities of the matter and in response to the articles' staunch nationalistic tone maintained that, "any solution which hinges on the future form of our state of government cannot possibly be any form of solution".⁷¹⁸ However, by 1947, Gerdener and the FMC actively advocated for the immediate implementation of formal and extensive residential segregation. In its now ardent separatist orientation, the FMC stipulated the terms of these differentiated areas: "the white man has no civil right in native areas and the native also has no right in the white areas".⁷¹⁹ That being said, the FMC had already by its inception made it clear to government officials that it based its policy of apartheid principally on the self-preservation of the white race. "It is the holy conviction of the Afrikaner-volk and church that this principle will be its saving grace".⁷²⁰ Gerdener conceived of this preservation of whiteness in his characteristic Christian paternalistic terms and argued that to safeguard the white civilization in South Africa would be to safeguard all racial groups, as whites were the bearers of Christianity and as such the key to black development.⁷²¹ As black dissatisfaction grew throughout the decade so too did this urgency to safeguard whiteness through separation. "If we do not hastily proceed along this direction [apartheid], white civilization will be doomed to miscegenation and degradation and, along with this, Christianity".⁷²² In the final year of 1940, Gerdener openly and passionately propagated total separation, holding that it would alleviate racial tension coupled with mixed living, reduce racial confusion, meet the desire in coloureds

⁷¹⁷Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, September 1945. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁷¹⁸Op Die Horison, No. 1, 1943.

⁷¹⁹Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, September 1947. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁷²⁰Federal Mission Council memorandum 1942. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁷²¹Op Die Horison, No. 4, 1948.

⁷²²Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, September 1947. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

and Indians to follow their own way of life and, more comprehensively, develop race consciousness, ambition and identity.⁷²³

Gerdener's political status also rose during the 1940s as he became a key figure in transcribing the church's ideal of separate development into secular racial legislation. The NP accepted apartheid as its official racial policy in 1945, however, only by the end of 1946 did apartheid begin to gain any real momentum in political talks. The following year D.F. Malan called together an investigative commission, headed by Paul Sauer, to clarify the NP's segregationist principle by means of establishing a comprehensive racial policy.⁷²⁴ Gerdener was the only non-parliamentarian amongst the five commission members, which included the like-minded M.D.C. de Wet Nel. The resulting Sauer Report consisted of three sections, with the central one being a mission policy clearly issuing from the mind of Gerdener.⁷²⁵ In its missional section the Sauer Report emphasized Christianity's missional responsibility towards blacks and, in the missional 'three selves' formula, stipulated its end goal as the creation of indigenous self-sustaining churches.⁷²⁶ Apart from his official involvement in the commission, Gerdener also made use of his position as a leading mission strategist to push the FMC's agenda on racial policy. In the months leading up to the 1948 election, with the NP's racial policy still in incubation, Gerdener met directly with the nationalist leader D.F. Malan behind closed doors. Amongst other topics, Gerdener lobbied for a racial policy to be set forth "with apartheid as one of the fundamental principles, and the survival of the white race in South Africa as its impetus".⁷²⁷ Malan, although sympathetic to the FMC's ideals, rendered Gerdener's vision of total separation too idealistic and feasibly impossible to implement.⁷²⁸ This brought to light the ambiguous inconsistencies in Gerdener's plan. On the one hand he lobbied for total apartheid, while at the same time he understood that a clean-cut division between races was unrealistic. "On the other hand, we cannot amalgamate ourselves with the idea of 100 percent separation, meaning that in our kitchen and farm, in our mines and factories, no non-white may be allowed. Such a view simply does not match the existing facts and needs".⁷²⁹ That being said, in a news article explaining the apartheid policy, six years into the NP's reign, D.F. Malan struck all the fundamental chords which Gerdener had been expounding as the foundation of his separatist vision: "Apartheid was based on what the Afrikaner believed to be his divine calling and

⁷²³Gerdener, *The crux of the racial situation in South Africa*, 287.

⁷²⁴Koorts, *DF Malan and the rise of Afrikaner Nationalism*, 371.

⁷²⁵Elphick, *Equality of believers*, 236.

⁷²⁶Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners*, 477.

⁷²⁷Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, September 1947. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁷²⁸Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, May 1950. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁷²⁹Op Die Horison, No. 1, 1947.

privilege; to convert the heathen to Christianity without obliterating his national identity”.⁷³⁰ Again, two days before the 1948 election, a FMC deputation met with the Minister of Native Affairs with the agenda of fleshing out its apartheid policy. Amongst the thirteen discussion points the church emphasized that all expressions of communism be stamped out, more separate black and coloured towns be established and that “better proof will be given to the non-white that Apartheid does not mean oppression... but rather to promote justice and fairness for each portion of society”.⁷³¹ Consequently, through his formal and informal influence, Gerdener significantly injected the essence of the DRC mission policy, which he himself had personally drafted, into the manifesto of the NP, which rose to governance in June 1948.⁷³²

The complete expression of Gerdener’s vision for total apartheid for South African society was crippled by the reality of selective segregation at ground-level. It hinged on the economic integration of the country which by 1948 included half the black population, and was the one matter which the Sauer Report could not find a comfortable solution to.⁷³³ The economic development of the Afrikaner people relied heavily on cheap black labour and if removed, would have had devastating economic consequences. During the middle decade of the 20th century Gerdener spent considerable time contemplating this conundrum, most profoundly through his role in a new organization known as the South African Bureau of Racial Affairs (SABRA). SABRA was established in September 1948 by a number of church leaders, academics and Afrikaner businessmen, and fulfilled a need which existed amongst all those with vested interest in the racial question. One which *Die Burger* referred to as “the need for a more scientific approach towards the racial questions of our country”.⁷³⁴ This racial think-tank epitomized the fusion of missional and racial policy within the apartheid system and already by November 1948 the executive commission of the FMC had decided to affiliate with SABRA.⁷³⁵ Its 19 founding members represented leading figures across various fields such as, M.D.C. de Wet Nel, N. Diederichs, W. Eiselen, W. Nicol and H.B. Thom, who were influential in the development of racial policy throughout the 1930s and 1940s. This included Gerdener, who was simultaneously the founding chairman.⁷³⁶ The racial agenda of SABRA was made clear in its mission statement and profoundly mirrored Gerdener’s own: “to strive for the separate development of, on the one hand the various non-whites, and on the other hand the white population groups in South Africa; to propagate and promote it and to safeguard the

⁷³⁰D.F. Malan, “Apartheid Afrikaner se roeping, voorreg.” *Die Burger*, 1/4/1954.

⁷³¹Federal Mission Council, memorandum 1948. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁷³²Elphick, *Equality of believers*, 237.

⁷³³Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners*, 477.

⁷³⁴SABRA year report, February 1950. [DRC Archives in SA, VGK-SIN568].

⁷³⁵Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, October 1949. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁷³⁶SABRA information pamphlet. [DRC Archives in SA, VGK-SIN568].

interest of these groups”.⁷³⁷ It was with this principle that SABRA critically cooperated with government departments on the racial terrain as it enjoyed free access to government decision makers. “SABRA is usually consulted on important measures relating to racial matters”.⁷³⁸ The race bureau was also considerably influential in the implementation of the infamous Group Areas Act.⁷³⁹ SABRA completed the third leg of Gerdener’s tripod of influence on racial issues, which now spanned comprehensively across ecclesiastical and secular realms through his leading role in the FMC, editorship of ODH and chairmanship of SABRA. It is noteworthy that all three these platforms had corresponding themes. They all projected a pseudo-scientific approach, they sought to promote inter-racial liaison, they were generally advertised as striving toward the upliftment of all racial populations along differentiated lines and they were vehemently focused on bettering apartheid’s public reputation. Gerdener increasingly emphasized the latter as an essential task of SABRA as the world’s spotlight began focusing itself more intensely on South Africa, especially through the newly established United Nations. “Very often the world’s judgment is wrapped in ignorance and prejudice... it is in our common interest that we should get the facts right for ourselves and should strive to inform the world beyond our borders as best we can”.⁷⁴⁰

In supporting the policy propagated by SABRA, Gerdener refused to give any merit to integration, however not on the basis of inherent white superiority but in service of “attaining a state of affairs in which the two groups [white and black] will have equal opportunity to freedom of expression, without clashing”.⁷⁴¹ In the first instance he feared that economic integration threatened the integrity of the entire apartheid policy, contending that unhindered economic integration would eventually extent to social and political mixing.⁷⁴² From this principle Gerdener developed his economic solution. He understood that cheap black labour bolstered the white economy and in order to overcome this conundrum he supported the concept of migrant labour, which he believed served both the ideal of total apartheid as well as economic stability.⁷⁴³ Concurrently and as a challenge to the nationalist’s Sauer Report, the United Party initiated a similar endeavour in 1948 and handed the responsibility of leadership to Henry Fagan. The corresponding report presented a dynamic evolutionary approach to the racial problem as opposed to the rigid recommendations of the Sauer Commission. In contrast to Gerdener’s ideals, the Fagan Report endorsed an ‘in-between’ option, which proposed that

⁷³⁷SABRA Statute. [DRC Archives in SA, VGK-SIN568].

⁷³⁸Ken u SABRA? [DRC Archives in SA, VGK-SIN568].

⁷³⁹Ibid.

⁷⁴⁰SABRA Chairman’s address, 1951. [DRC Archives in SA, VGK-SIN568].

⁷⁴¹SABRA Voorsittersrede, 1955. [DRC Archives in SA, VGK-SIN568].

⁷⁴²SABRA Voorsittersrede, 1953. [DRC Archives in SA, VGK-SIN568].

⁷⁴³SABRA Voorsittersrede, 1955. [DRC Archives in SA, VGK-SIN568].

whites and blacks would work side-by-side within an intertwined economy as mutual contributors to the same machine and dismissed the idea of Africans only entering white areas as temporary labourers.⁷⁴⁴ SABRA ousted the Fagan Reports' claim that total segregation "could not be followed due to the great sacrifice which would go along with it" and further rejected its recommendation of parallelism which SABRA contended "can only end up as assimilation".⁷⁴⁵ In a public report, SABRA management finally concluded that it saw no alternative to the policy of complete and utter segregation and called for the dismantling of economic interdependency. "The time has ripened to consider the consequences of integration and that a new policy in this regard should be formulated and implemented – a policy which will prevent the further permanent settling of native workers in cities and; also in interest of the native and his separate survival and development, stop the process of integration."⁷⁴⁶

As he had introduced the racial question on moral grounds, so too did Gerdener close it. In his bid against selective segregation Gerdener argued that humanism outweighed economy and that at its core the racial question should not be determined by financial matters. Characteristically, he presented the case of total apartheid to Afrikaners introspectively and, due to its required surrendering of black labour, called upon their consciences to make the necessary sacrifices. "That the process of differential development will demand sacrifice, speaks for itself... we will need to learn to do many of our henchman's chores ourselves".⁷⁴⁷ In the fight for his policy of sacrifice and in response to J.H. Hofmeyr's questioning of the Afrikaner people's willingness, Gerdener envisioned the church as a leading protagonist in steering the apartheid policy to its intended fruition: "the Christian church needs to use its influence to deal with unwillingness on the part of those who recommend segregation, but who will not pay the price for its righteous and sufficient application".⁷⁴⁸

The climax of 1950

The mechanics of Gerdener's apartheid vision reached its greatest expression through a monumental and inter-departmental ecclesiastical conference on the native question in 1950. Already by 1945, the idea of convening a people's conference, Union-wide in scale, on the matter of racial relations was aired by the FMC.⁷⁴⁹ "Conferences are especially necessary in

⁷⁴⁴Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners*, 478.

⁷⁴⁵SABRA response to the Fagan Report, 1950. [DRC Archives in SA, VGK-SIN568].

⁷⁴⁶SABRA year report, 1950. [DRC Archives in SA, VGK-SIN568].

⁷⁴⁷Ibid.

⁷⁴⁸Gerdener, *The crux of the racial situation in South Africa*, 289.

⁷⁴⁹Gerdener, *Reguit koers gehou*, 103.

our country”, Gerdener argued, “as in countries where the distances are less, the churches are more uniform and the population more homogenous”.⁷⁵⁰ However, it was only at the end of 1947, in an executive commission meeting with Gerdener as leader, that a formal decision was made. Gerdener was the driving force behind the conference and at the meeting five task specific committees were formed so as to properly organize the ins and outs of the event. Membership within these committees comprised influential Afrikaner intellectuals as well as comrades of Gerdener’s on racial matters, such as W. Eiselen, N. Diederichs, C. Badenhorst and the more moderate nationalist M.D.C. de Wet Nel.⁷⁵¹ The original date for the conference was set for March of 1949. However, the urgency of such a conference, which had as its agenda the clarifying of the DRC’s position on apartheid, was somewhat eased after the nationalist’s electoral victory in 1948, and the date was postponed to April 1950.⁷⁵² In the months leading up to the conference, experts from across academic fields were approached to deliver papers on carefully selected topics. At the final meeting of the FMC before the conference, it was suggested that a black leader be added to the list of speakers. This motion, was however rejected, and all speakers would consequently be from the white demographic.⁷⁵³ One reason for this dismissal of African board representation may have been to serve the underlying intention of the conference, which was to first bring about unanimity on racial matters amongst the white DRC members.⁷⁵⁴ At the conference Gerdener expressed the hope that, once the need for white unification was met, the organizing of a similar conference for black people would commence. This came to fruition the following year.⁷⁵⁵

Days before the conference and with all the arrangements in place, Gerdener aired his hopes for the ground-breaking possibilities of the upcoming conference, the first of its kind. Coupled with his optimism came the issue of the dual problem which a conference of such an integrated nature entailed. Gerdener argued that, although the question of racial relations had far wider implications than just evangelization, the upcoming conference should ward against falling prey to a scientific approach so cold that it lost sight of the church’s task. In this he stipulated his missiological aspirations for the conference: “every conference decision must be compliant to and in service of the broadening of our great evangelistic program and must in the first instance serve the spiritual salvation of the native. Herein lies the core of the entire question – the acceptance of the gospel and all that goes with it”.⁷⁵⁶ All his hopes would be put

⁷⁵⁰Op Die Horison, No. 1, 1950.

⁷⁵¹Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, November 1947. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁷⁵²Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, September 1948. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁷⁵³Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, October 1949. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁷⁵⁴Van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener*, 195.

⁷⁵⁵Minutes of the Ecclesiastical conference on Native Question, 1950. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV232].

⁷⁵⁶Op Die Horison, No. 1, 1950.

to the test when, on the 4th of April, close to 600 delegates representing the white, coloured and black DRCs, as well as the Gereformeerde and Hervormde Afrikaner churches, gathered in Bloemfontein. Delegates at the conference also included anthropologists, various state departments, DRC missionaries, DRC mission commissions, the CCSA, the Institute of Race Relations, SABRA, the CSV, other missionally related bodies such as the women's and men's mission organisations as well as the newly constituted World Council of Churches, through the person of J.C. Hoekendyk. The attendance of Hoekendyk was a direct channel to an external point of view and was a key link which Gerdener hoped would counteract any possible misunderstandings or misrepresentations permeating from the meeting.⁷⁵⁷

Gerdener was selected as chairman of the conference and promptly opened the gathering with a scriptural reading focusing on Matthew 14:27. Several commissions were then instituted to deal with the administration of the conference. One of these commissions dealt with all matters pertaining to publicity and Gerdener's son, Theo, who later found a political career within the NP and would subsequently establish the Democratic Party in 1973, served on said committee.⁷⁵⁸ The several points of contact between missiology and secular matters which Gerdener frequently identified were all represented in the six discussion points dealt with throughout the three-day conference. The first of these grappled with the ecclesiastical and religious aspects of the native question and was led by Gerdener himself. In his speech Gerdener covered all the classic areas which made up his principle of separate development; the primary goal of evangelism, the accountability to history, with end goal being the indigenous development of blacks and coloureds into self-determining entities within their own territories and with their own cultural identities.⁷⁵⁹ Most noteworthy was the section of his speech which dealt with the relationship between scripture and apartheid. In the months leading up to the conference Gerdener's paper received criticism from the review commission on the grounds that he had not given sufficient space to the scriptural justification of apartheid.⁷⁶⁰ As Gerdener was never entirely comfortable with an outright biblical justification, he subsequently did not use any direct biblical references when addressing the concept of apartheid. In keeping with his moderate approach to sensitive topics, Gerdener highlighted certain biblical principles such as 'diversity within unity', 'calling' and 'predestination' which he argued served as a basis for separate development. In closing, Gerdener tied together all the arguments which constituted his racial idealism: "the Apartheid policy which we stand for and which is also

⁷⁵⁷Gerdener, *Reguit koers gehou*, 104.

⁷⁵⁸Minutes of the Ecclesiastical conference on Native Question, 1950. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV232].

⁷⁵⁹Minutes of the Ecclesiastical conference on Native Question, 1950. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV232].

⁷⁶⁰Van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener*, 195.

reflected in the law of our country's government, as established in 1936, is no static situation. It refers to a process of development, which each volk – on the purest and speediest way – can use to reach its own calling under God's gracious watch. It is the means to an end; that of an independent status. It aims to remove the possibility of friction, of unequal and unhealthy collision between the more and less developed. Only once the less developed reaches its own – on a church and religious level – will we be able to reach out the hand of communal religion.”⁷⁶¹ The conference topics which followed dealt with aspects of education, led by W. Eiselen; politics, which centred around the threat of communism and was led by N. Diederichs; social-welfare, health services and economics. Ironically, the latter topic was led by one of the three Stellenbosch academics which Gerdener had criticized in 1943 for proposing a too hardened segregation policy, namely P.J. Coertze.⁷⁶²

The 1950 conference was the high point of Gerdener and his supporter's call for total separation on all fronts. In the construction of a post-conference report, which would encompass all the papers delivered and publish the conferences' decisions, Gerdener emphasized that “the report must accentuate the thought of hope by underscoring the advantages of the resolutions”.⁷⁶³ Furthermore, the FMC once again sent a flurry of deputations armed with the conferences' resolutions of total apartheid to several governors. The Prime Minister, D.F. Malan, again brushed off the recommendation of the DRC church leaders as far too impractical and stated that the DRC's policy of total separation was not entirely the policy of the NP.⁷⁶⁴ The deputation who met the minister and secretary of Native Affairs, E.G. Jansen and W. Eiselen, where dealt a similar blow. Jansen made it clear that, although total apartheid was a nice idea, such an ideal would fall on arid ground primarily based on the objection from farmers and industries to the diminishment of their black labour force, with no viable solution to the resultant vacancy.⁷⁶⁵

The final hurdle to Gerdener's grand idealistic vision of a totally segregated society would ultimately be its eventual downfall. The prediction made by J.H. Hofmeyr at the start of the 1940s, of the Afrikaner's unwillingness to sacrifice, proved prophetic. Although Gerdener's plan did not reach its fullest expression, it cannot be argued away that the racial principles and ideals which he proposed considerably shaped the philosophy behind the Afrikaner's racial policy. A policy which buttressed a totalitarian system which legislatively dominated the country until the 1994 election and justified a minority rule based on racial arguments. By the

⁷⁶¹Minutes of the Ecclesiastical conference on Native Question, 1950. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV232].

⁷⁶²Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, October 1949. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁷⁶³Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, May 1950. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

⁷⁶⁴Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners*, 484.

⁷⁶⁵Federal Mission Council meeting minutes, May 1950. [DRC Archives in SA, DIV236].

tenth year of the NP's rule, with apartheid as its guiding principle, the Gerdernerian influence was already internationally noticed. When visiting South Africa in 1958 with the intention of investigating the roots of the apartheid system, the American journalist Robert Ardrey, wrote as conclusion to his findings that, "it was a man named Gerdener who had been the principal author of Apartheid".⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶⁶Robert Ardrey, "South Africa: a personal report by Robert Ardrey," In: *The Reporter*. 27 September 1958.

Conclusion

From a distance, the close knit and ever-increasing rise of Afrikaner nationalism seems somewhat simple in its intent and composed in its execution. However, upon deeper inspection, fissures, disparities and prevalent confusion become apparent within the movement. This turbulence within Afrikaner leadership becomes all the more visible when its racial rationale is considered. Confusion seems to envelope even the most fundamental pillar upon which the nationalists rose to power, that of apartheid. Lindie Koorts, the most modern biographer of D.F. Malan, draws on this when she notes how Malan, often dubbed the father of apartheid, himself did not seem to comprehensively grasp what was meant by apartheid. He seemed to think of it merely as a new term to describe the ideals of traditional segregation.⁷⁶⁷ These diversities within a sometimes seemingly uniform Afrikaner nationalism is epitomized in the life and work of G.B.A. Gerdener.

Gerdener's story is testament to the fact that not all nationalists of the time can just be offhandedly bunched into the same basket. It brings to light the contrasting currents which flowed with Afrikaner nationalism, during a formative time of both cultural identity and racial relations. What influenced Gerdener's unique stance within the plethora of positions beneath the blanket of Afrikaner nationalism, was his particular exposure to ecumenicism and dedication to Christian mission from a young age. This was further formed by his commitment to 19th century mission theory and its coupled approaches of mission church independence and Christian trusteeship. This not only energized his efforts towards entrenching Afrikaner identity, pride and self-awareness, but also directed his racial ideology. An ideology which had as its intention the creation of autonomous states, in which each ethnic group in South Africa would be able to express itself without the threat of external imposition. Using the term separate development, Gerdener eloquently justified this ideology with religious language and motivated it missiologically. In so doing, he presented his grand scheme to a religious Afrikaner nation as the sole ethical, just and moral solution to South Africa's racial question and one which was to the absolute benefit of the white, coloured, black and Indian population.

What Gerdener's story also reveals is the ever-present signature of irony within history, both in a personal and country-wide manner. In the case of South Africa and her people it is an immensely painful irony which carried with it a destructive consequence. A discernible disconnect separated the intentions from the outcomes of many of Gerdener's aspirations. This

⁷⁶⁷ Koorts, *DF Malan and the rise of Afrikaner Nationalism*, 348.

in itself is steeped in irony, as it was this very disconnect which Gerdener sought to avoid as he placed great emphasis on pragmatism. An example of this disconnect is illuminated when comparing Gerdener's emphasis on inter-racial transparency, dialogue and supposed DRC sincerity to the reality of the black and coloured church's contempt at being excluded from the white DRC's discussions on racial matters, and its support of apartheid, leading up to the 1948 election.⁷⁶⁸ A crucial disconnect between reality and idealism, however, in Gerdener's work and one which had far-reaching consequences for the ensuing decades was the racial ideology which he put forth.

During the 1940s Gerdener and his thinking towards South Africa's societal solution seemed progressive when compared to other Afrikaner nationalists. His support for segregation rested upon a double standard, in which he sought the equalled development of African and coloured people, as the white population, within their own demarcated communities. This is reflected when comparing his position to that of J.G. Strydom's, whose segregation permeated out of a blatant racism which had the solitary intention of serving the interest of white domination. In his urgent attempts to justify and validate his segregationist theories, as being to the benefit of all portions of society, Gerdener presented it within an overtly moralistic and ethical manner and wrapped it in eloquently idealistic language. The impact of this was immense on the psyche of the Afrikaner people and their growing positive attitude towards apartheid during the mid-20th century. This is illuminated by Frederik van Zyl Slabbert, later a prominent anti-apartheid activist, when he reflected on the grand manner in which apartheid was advertised as a progressive ideal during his years as a student at Stellenbosch and the general excitement regarding apartheid as South Africa's salvation amongst the students.⁷⁶⁹ This seemingly progressive idealism of Gerdener's, however, was far removed from reality and the monstrous realities his theories eventually manifested. To a great extent, the eloquent and seemingly moral way in which he conferred his position provided the grounds upon which something abnormal was able to be normalised.

Gerdener's prognosis that apartheid would be the only channel through which all South Africans could flourish was dismally wrong. This damaging disconnect from reality is profoundly reflected in the life of Beyers Naudé. Naudé was a DRC minister and a prominent figure within Afrikaner nationalism. His father was an Afrikaner *bittereinder* during the Anglo-Boer war, as well as a co-founder of the Afrikaner Broederbond in 1918. Naudé was the youngest member to ever be inaugurated into the secretive Afrikaner organization and had a

⁷⁶⁸ Op Die Horison, No. 1, 1947.

⁷⁶⁹ Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners*, 478.

clear path to climbing the ladder of Afrikaner leadership, so much so that in 1958 at the age of 43 he was selected as the Moderator of the Transvaal DRC. At this point in time, although having had certain questions regarding apartheid already during his student days, Naudé was convinced of the goodness of apartheid and was a supporter of the Afrikaner's policy. His selection as DRC Moderator also displayed the Afrikaner's trust in Naudé as a leader which upheld Afrikaner interests. Concurrently with his ascension within the Transvaal DRC was a growing awareness amongst young DRC ministers, such as Chris Greyling and Charl le Roux who were connected to the DRC mission church, of the suffering under the apartheid regime. These young ministers consequently approached Naudé with the reality of injustice which confronted them within their black and coloured congregations. Naudé struggled to believe their stories, in which they shared the suffering which their congregants experienced due to apartheid, and subsequently prompted the young ministers to invite Naudé to their congregations to see the suffering first-hand. These initial contacts with black congregations and church leaders, in which they shared with Naudé their stories of suffering, broke the ignorance which shielded him his whole life from the evil of apartheid. This initiated Naudé's social conversion regarding the apartheid policy as well as his lifelong struggle for liberation and social equality.⁷⁷⁰ It took Naudé 43 years before he was exposed to the unjust reality of a policy which he was enculturated to believe was moral and after these elementary conversations with black people he wrote to his colleague Nico Smith, also a prominent anti-apartheid activist, in which he shared his existential realization of the oppressive nature at the underbelly of apartheid.

To a large extent, the story of Beyers Naudé reflects the disconnect between the progressive idealism and the destructive reality of Gerdener's position. Gerdener's ideology and the way in which he presented it, served to isolate Afrikaner consciousness from the reality of discrimination which marked apartheid. Further, Gerdener's idealism of autochthonous development and its supposed sophistication provided apartheid with the moral thread required for the system to continue formally for 46 years. Had apartheid not been fed with this moral justification and had the racism beneath not been shielded by this dialogue, it could be argued that it would not have had such a longevity and that its dismantling would have been far less complicated and convoluted. This direct connection between Gerdener's ideological position and the realistic implementation and manifestations thereof, is an interesting field of inquiry and an avenue for possible further academic investigation.

⁷⁷⁰ Ruhan Fourie. *Beyers Naudé 1915-1963: Die Vorming van 'n Dissidente Afrikaner*, Master's thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2018. <https://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/103767>.

This research, in its attempt at getting inside the head of Gerdener, sought to bring to light currents within his thinking in as neutral a manner as possible. The patterns in Gerdener's thinking, and the sometimes-surprising progressiveness there within, should not be understood in isolation. It would be immensely irresponsible if his thoughts and theories are removed from their context, as well as from the practical way in which they manifested in society, which brought with it terrible pain for the majority of our country. For example, although Gerdener believed all people to be spiritually equal and that eventually blacks would reach a social equality with whites, he maintained, within his paternalistic orientation, the idea that whites were socially superior to blacks in his time. As such, his ideals of a future society of equality was one which he placed far into the future, and that for his time, and immediate future, whites were to guide and lead African people to a civilized maturity. This reality in Gerdener's thinking, and the other marks of classical Afrikaner nationalism, cannot be downplayed or forgotten. Therefore, in the biographical nature of this study, the intention was to bring to light the currents within Gerdener's rationale so as to inform our understanding of the man behind the DRC's racial policies. It is in no way an attempt at justification, it is not an apologia, but merely an inquiry for further understanding.

G.B.A. Gerdener was a complex figure within the rising tide of Afrikaner nationalism and one who played an intimate role in the South African racial developments. His unique upbringing within a German missiological framework, his membership within ecumenical and evangelical streams and his adherence to an optimistic 19th century mission theory significantly dictated his policies and subsequently the racial policies of the Afrikaner minority who found themselves in governance by the middle of the 20th century. Gerdener personified the intimate involvement which the DRC had in the secular governance of the country, through the NP, and foreshadowed this church-state relationship in the years which followed. A relationship which was only formally severed after the inauguration of a secular and democratic government in 1994. The mark which Gerdener left on the subconscious of the Afrikaner people is unmistakable and is often overlooked due to the fact that his influence was exerted largely behind closed doors, as opposed to a popularized political podium, such as was used by D.F. Malan and H. Verwoerd. Therefore, an awareness of Gerdener's thinking and influence in the development of our country's darkest heritage is of immense importance and especially when considering the development of racial relations in South Africa.

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